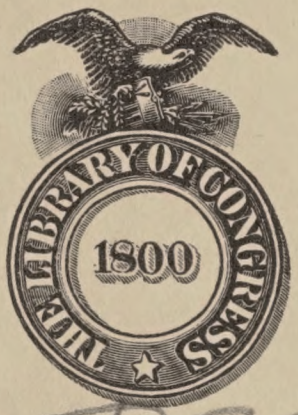
MERRY ANDREW

KEBLE HOWARD



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MERRY-ANDREW

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NOVELS

Love and a Cottage
The God in the Garden
Love in June
The Smiths of Surbiton
The Whip Hand
The Bachelor Girls
The Girl who couldn't Lie
Miss Charity
The Smiths of Valley View
The Cheerful Knave
The Happy Vanners
One of the Family
Lord London

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Our John, M.P.
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Charles, His Friend
The Dramatist at Home
Come Michaelmas
The Cheerful Knave
The Girl who couldn't Lie
The Embarrassed Butler
Wisdom Teeth
Dropping the Pilot

MERRY-ANDREW

BY

KEBLE HOWARD

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A REAL CONVERSATION

"THANKS," said my friend, laying the manuscript of the following story upon my writing-table.

"Now for the criticism."

"Sure you want it?"

"Of course!"

"Very well. Since you ask me to be candid, I scarcely think that any young man would have behaved in real life quite so foolishly as your Andrew Dick behaved when he first came to London."

"That's a peculiarly bitter blow."

"Why?"

"Because that is precisely the way I behaved when *I* first came to London."

"Oh. . . . Then Andrew Dick is yourself?"

"Not precisely. Surely a man may draw on his own experiences for the foundation of a novel without making himself responsible for everything that the hero says and does?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But don't you think he should indicate which is fact and which fiction?"

"Leaving nothing to the intelligence of the reader?"

"Perhaps the reader may not be in the mood to exert his intelligence."

"Then let him take it all as fiction."

"Still, just between ourselves, what about those love affairs?"

"Good morning."

"Are they——?"

"Good morning."

"Cad!"

K. H.

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MERRY-ANDREW

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

LOVE, A PUNT, AND THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

"I'M doing two wrong things," said Sylvia.

"Then you must be perfectly happy."

"I hate you when you talk like that."

"Why?"

"It's so frightfully slavish."

"I thought you liked me to be slavish."

"I like you to be natural."

"Well, when I'm with you, it's natural to be slavish."

"Don't be an idiot, Andrew."

"I thought I was being rather bright."

"It was so painfully obvious that you were trying to be bright."

"Thanks. I'm always unnatural when I'm bright."

"No, you're not. You're only unnatural when you try to be bright."

"I was merely endeavouring to keep the conversation up to the correct Eights Week level."

"Keep it down, you mean. And why on earth should it matter to us how the others talk?"

"I always like to be in the picture."

"I know you do. That's one of your most serious

weaknesses. You've been saying to yourself for the past hour, 'This is Eights Week, and a beautiful afternoon, and I am on the Char in a punt with a rather nice girl——' "

"A very beautiful girl!"

"Yes, I daresay you would even go as far as that in your desire to be pictorial. It's an awfully bad habit you're getting into, Andrew. I often feel that your only reason for making love to me is because you wish to be in the picture."

"Not at all. I'm perfectly natural when I'm making love to you."

"Just as natural as you are when you're eating your breakfast. It's a habit."

"I was taught to cultivate good habits."

"But I refuse to be made a habit of."

"Then what am I to make of you?"

"There's no necessity—at present, at any rate—for you to make anything at all of me. We've both got our hands full trying to make something of *you.* That's why I said that I was doing two wrong things."

"You're making me very happy. That completely wipes out both the wrong things—whatever they may be."

"Oh, no, it doesn't. You've no business to be happy. You've always been happy, ever since you were born, and look at the awful result."

"Is the result so very awful?" Andrew smiled.

"Of course it's awful. That self-satisfied smile completely bears out my argument. Young men of twenty-one have no right to be complacent. They ought to be full of anxiety, full of ambition, full of fight, full of—oh, heaps of things!"

"My dear Sylvia, a man may be full to the brim with all those things without getting the chance to show it."

"That's nonsense. The most serious event in your life up to the present is due to take place in less than a month's time, and yet here you are, stretched out on a heap of cushions, smoking a cigarette, dabbling your hand in the water, and trying to look as much as possible like all the other undergrads., who keep paddling up and down this very pretty, but far too seductive little river. You ought never to have persuaded me to come out with you this afternoon."

"You appear to forget that your mother warmly approved the idea."

"Mother warmly approves of everything. If the house caught fire, she'd stand on the lawn, with her head slightly to one side, and say that the flames were lovely. You know that very well. I repeat that you ought not to have persuaded me to come out with you, and I ought not to have allowed myself to be persuaded. You said you could write your essay just as well in the punt as in your rooms, and you haven't written a line. What time have you got to be with your tutor?"

"Five o'clock. Isn't that exactly like old Stiffkey? Stiffkey has absolutely no appreciation whatever of the beauty of summer, or the beauty of Oxford, or the beauty of youth, or the beauty of love. He's the dullest man in Oxford, and that's why he took a brilliant First. I'm one of the cleverest men in Oxford, if not *the* cleverest, and that's why, in all probability, I shan't take anything at all."

"But you *must* take something!" said Sylvia, sitting

up and looking at Andrew with very serious eyes. "Whatever happens, you must take your degree. Think how disappointed your father will be if you don't."

"Is he so anxious for me to be in the picture?"

"He's anxious for you to be a credit to him, and to yourself, and to your college, and to your school. It's a most disgraceful thing to go down from Oxford without taking a degree! It would cling to you all your life, and I shouldn't dream of marrying a man who had such a stigma attaching to him."

"D'you really mean that, Sylvia?"

"Most certainly I mean it."

"Then, of course, I'll take one. But you might have said so before. Three weeks isn't very much time for a chap to cover the work of two years and take Honours in Theology."

"What have you been doing all these two years, then?"

"Oh, I've been tremendously busy. To begin with, I've been to all Stiffkey's lectures on the English and Continental Reformation. That's taken at least ten years off my life. Nobody ever goes to Stiffkey's lectures, you know, except his own pupils; and even they drop off long before the end of the course. We started with six, I remember, and finished up with one. I was the one."

"I'm glad to hear that. It was rather fine of you, Andrew, to attend a lecture that lasted for two years."

"Yes, I think it showed an indomitable spirit. But I had my own little narcotic. You see, Stiffkey doesn't exactly lecture. He merely reads his own notes for an hour, and his wretched pupils are supposed to take

it all down. He might just as well print his notes, and sell them to us at five shillings a time. But that would entirely do away with him as a lecturer. He likes to think of himself as a lecturer. Well, my plan was very simple. I just let the man read on, and instead of taking down all his dry rubbish, I wrote little stories and articles for various papers. Stiffkey was awfully flattered, and congratulated me on my industry."

"Is that true? Is that the way people are supposed to be taught things at Oxford?"

"Yes. It's known as the Oxford system. That's why our fond parents send us up here at a huge expense, and I suppose that's how we get what the outside world loves to call the Oxford manner."

"And what became of the stories and articles?"

"Oh, they were published, you know."

"In papers?"

"Yes, in papers and magazines."

"All of them?"

"I don't think there *are* enough papers and magazines to publish *all* the stories and articles I wrote at Stiffkey's lectures. You see, when a man lectures six hours a week for two years, you can get through an awful lot of writing."

"But why didn't you ever tell me that you had written all those things and got them published?"

"Well, you live a little too near the governor, and the governor doesn't approve of people who write. They're not in the picture."

"You mean that you couldn't trust me? Thank you very much."

"It wasn't that, but I wouldn't place such a burden on your conscience."

"Is that true, Andrew?"

"Perfectly true. I have my redeeming points, you know."

"Will you show me some of the things you've written next time we come round to your rooms?"

"Yes, if you'll promise to marry me."

"That largely depends on what sort of things you've written."

"Oh, then I'm quite sure you won't marry me."

"Are they so very——?"

"Their characteristic feature is what Stiffkey would call youthful irresponsibility. I don't think there's anything serious in any of them. That's why they wouldn't appeal to you, Sylvia. Next to Stiffkey, I think you're the most serious person I know."

"And yet you want to marry me."

"Entirely for my own good. At present I'm like a kite without a tail, and you're the only girl I know who could prevent me from pitching on my head."

"I'm not sure that that's a very splendid career—to marry a man in order to prevent him from pitching on his head."

"I can't conceive of any career more full of glorious opportunities. Some women marry men to save them from drink; some women marry men to save them from food; you would marry me to save me from being too light-hearted."

"I absolutely refuse to listen to any more of your rubbish. You'll either take this punt home at once, or you'll write your essay for Mr. Stiffkey. I don't believe for one moment all the unkind things that

you've said about him. I've always heard of him as one of the most brilliant men in Oxford."

"That's exactly what he is, and the most brilliant thing he ever did in his life was to remain in Oxford. If he ever went outside it, he'd discover that there are such things as trams which are not pulled by horses, and that would upset him so completely that he'd die of shock."

"Will you write your essay or will you take me home?"

"I'll write my essay. I must ask you to stop talking for ten minutes."

"You can't write an essay in ten minutes, Andrew."

"Oh, can't I? You'll see."

He threw his cigarette into the water, found a notebook and a piece of pencil, and began to write. It is one of the peculiarities of Oxford, and an internal witness to the insidiousness of the place, that those who spend any length of time in it quickly fail to see the incongruity of anybody working in it, especially young people in the summer term. If there is any excuse for such institutions as Oxford and Cambridge, which is extremely doubtful,* it is that here we have the perfect setting for complete idleness in the flower of England's youth. Oxford, in particular, was made for happy sloth. The enervating atmosphere, combined with the fascination of smooth flowing water, old gardens filled with old fashioned flowers, grey walls, and the general pervading air of sleeping centuries, all combine to make Oxford the choicest spot

*This remark has been gloriously falsified since the outbreak of war. Oxford and Cambridge have proved themselves the ideal recruiting grounds of the world. K. H.

in the world for a three years' siesta. Parents and guardians, who have discovered too late in life that there is no such thing as perfect rest in the great world, should form themselves into a gigantic league for the abolition of work at Oxford. They would find a very ready response on the part of the undergraduates, and, to a lesser extent, on the part of the dons. It is true that a fair proportion of young men with stronger characters than the majority have managed to resist the tyrannous convention of Schools and lectures; but their efforts towards the revival of the golden age, though beyond all praise from the point of view of real thinkers, do not meet with the support that they merit.

To the eye of the poet, it would have seemed an almost criminal thing that Andrew Dick, at the age of twenty-one, being of sound mind and body, with a splendid capacity for enjoyment, reclining in a punt within a few feet of an extremely attractive girl, with willows over his head, rushes and buttercups to the left of him, water to the right of him, and not a sin of any consequence to his account, should be covering sheets of paper with preposterous nonsense which could neither be of interest to him nor of benefit to humanity, in obedience to the commands of a stout, rubicund, childish don, who was himself reaping the fruits of a preposterously laborious youth by checking the milkman's account in a little villa in North Oxford. And yet the youths and maidens who passed to and fro in punts and Canadian canoes saw nothing grotesque in the sight of anybody at work that glorious afternoon, and the girl, who had long since made up her mind to marry him, actually watched

Andrew wasting his glorious youth and his quite exceptional abilities with approving eyes.

For ten minutes the pencil scribbled and scribbled; at the end of that time, as he had promised, Andrew threw it down and announced that that was quite enough for old Stiffkey.

"What's it about?" asked Sylvia.

"About the Epistle to the Colossians."

"Will you read it to me?"

"D'you really think you could stand it?"

"Of course. If I'm to be your wife I must be able to share all your interests."

"That has nothing to do with the matter, but it'll serve you right to have to listen to it. Here's the subject of the essay:

"The authenticity of the Epistle to the Colossians has been disputed by many commentators. Discuss this."

"But do you know anything about it?" asked Sylvia, with some surprise.

"Not a thing," said Andrew, cheerfully. "That doesn't matter. I never do know anything about anything, but I can always write about everything. Here goes."

"In approaching the question of the authenticity of the Epistle to the Colossians, as it has been handed down to us, we must refrain from striving to prove that authenticity by internal evidence."

"Why must we?"

"For the very obvious reason that I haven't got any internal evidence. You mustn't interrupt.

"We must not even ask ourselves why the writer of this Epistle should address himself to such a com-

paratively small audience as the inhabitants of Colossæ. It should be sufficient for us that the Epistle has been preserved throughout so many generations, and handed down to us, in all probability, exactly as it was written. Attempts have been made to prove that the motives of the writer are not characteristic of the motives that guided the hand that wrote the other epistles attributed to the same author, but it must not be forgotten that the spirit of the times was so troublous that all the ordinary analyses of human conduct should be set aside in consideration of such a subject as the present. It is an undisputed fact that St. Paul indited letters to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Thessalonians, to the Philippians, to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, and to the Hebrews. Why, then, we may reasonably ask ourselves, should he not also have taken pen in hand to indite an epistle to the Colossians?

"Consider the position at this day of the city of Colossæ. Though a small city, as compared with Rome or with Corinth, it nevertheless enjoyed a distinction of no mean importance among the trading cities of the Ancient World. The merchants of Colossæ, no less than the merchants of Rome and of Corinth, trafficked in the banks and in the market place. Merchandise, passing through busy hands, came and went; there were, no doubt, innumerable sects and creeds and religions and beliefs and doctrines; there was marrying and giving in marriage; the men of healing went upon their way; there were the professors of poetry and of rhetoric; who shall say, therefore, that Colossæ was not a fruitful field for the great message that the apostle was called upon to de-

liver? In conclusion, then, we must repeat, in the most emphatic manner possible, that we utterly refuse to attach any credence to the somewhat shallow questioning placed by certain commentators upon the authenticity of this epistle. And it should be remembered, in a spectacular age, that it is far easier to throw doubt upon the authenticity of this or that sacred document than it is to advance scientific reasons for the acceptance of their genuineness."

"Is that the end?" asked Sylvia.

"Yes, that's all I can think of. Will it do?"

"Of course, it's most awfully clever. It sounds almost like the sort of sermons that you hear in a cathedral."

"I don't know that old Stiffkey wanted a sermon, exactly. We treat Theology as a science up here, you know—not as a religion."

"I'm very sorry to hear it. They ought to know better—all those old men in long gowns."

"Oh, that doesn't apply to their private lives."

"Then what does it apply to?"

"I don't quite know, except that the great idea seems to be to make everything as difficult as possible. Still, I generally come out rather well in examinations. If a chap can write like that without knowing anything whatever about the subject, they must see that it would be absurd to turn him down without giving him some sort of a Class."

"Wouldn't it be lovely if you got a First?" breathed Sylvia.

"There's no chance of that. You can't get a First in Theol. without Hebrew. I might have got a Sec-

ond if I'd swotted, but, as it is, I shall be quite content with a Third or even a Fourth."

"Is that the lowest of all?"

"Not quite. There's a thing called a Gulf, which means that you can take your degree, and if you're not even good enough for a Gulf, they generally give you Group D, which is the third part of a pass degree. So that I'm bound to get something out of it. Would you like to hear my essay again?"

"I don't think so. You'd better go and read it to Mr. Stiffkey."

Andrew untied the punt, and paddled slowly and luxuriously back to the boat-house. It was characteristic of him to paddle the punt instead of punting it. Punting is a somewhat difficult feat, and Andrew always took the line of least resistance.

He escorted Sylvia to the rooms which he had taken for her and her mother, and then, not altogether without a little nervous fluttering at the heart, boarded one of the slow old horse trams which would land him within a hundred yards of Mr. Stiffkey's modest villa.

CHAPTER II

ANDREW AMONG THE THEOLOGIANS

THE Reverend John Gehazi Stiffkey, having finished his checking of the tradesmen's books, and discovered, much to his satisfaction, that the butcher had made a mistake of fivepence in his own (the butcher's) favour, was now seated in his small study with his feet on a foot-stool precisely the height of the chair on which he was sitting, and a tray containing a pot of tea and a toasted tea-cake on a small table at his side. He was a clean-shaven man about thirty-five years of age, and far too fat for complete health. He played no games of any kind whatsoever, his sole exercise being the walk from his villa to the tram terminus and from the tram terminus to his villa. Having taken First Class Honours in Classical Moderations, and First Class Honours in Theology, he had settled down, at the age of two-and-twenty, to the life of an Oxford tutor. There was no need for him to acquire any more knowledge; he had enough and to spare for all the requirements of his life. There was no need for him to keep abreast of the times, as the vulgar saying goes, for the goods in which he dealt could never grow stale, having been dead long before he acquired his interest in them. He had neither charm of personality, originality of mind, nor the art of imparting the information which he had so

laboriously acquired from the books of others; but these limitations did not trouble him in the least. The supply of young men coming up to Oxford would never fail; the form of examination through which they would have to pass would never alter; a certain proportion of them would be bound to come his way. Nothing could be easier than to lecture on a subject which one had, if not precisely at one's fingers' ends, at any rate in a large number of studiously compiled note-books. Vary the reading aloud of these notes so many hours per week by listening to the essays of one's pupils, and then dictating more notes from more studiously compiled note-books, and your living was assured.

Mr. Stiffkey had quite naturally taken Holy Orders, partly because it was no trouble at all to do so, and partly because Sunday duty was very easy work, and enabled one to add at least one hundred and fifty pounds to one's income. And then, if one spoke the great ones fair, and attended all such meetings as the great ones attended, and echoed the views and opinions of the great ones with that tone of admiring enthusiasm in the voice which conveyed a pleasing flattery whilst stopping short of sycophancy, there was always the chance that something snug would come one's way in the natural order of the events of this world.

Small wonder, then, that Mr. Stiffkey grew fatter and more oleaginous as the years rolled over his cherubic head. The busy world outside the sacred gates of Oxford might have said that here was a perfectly useless being, who, having succeeded in jumping through the prescribed number of hoops in his own

youth, was quite content to spend the remainder of his days in watching other young men jump through the same hoops in precisely the same manner. But the outside world, knowing nothing of scholarship, had no reverence for it; whilst Mr. Stiffkey passed his days amongst those who revered scholarship for its own sake, and would never have dreamed of ranging themselves with the mere utilitarians by demanding that scholarship should be turned to some useful account in the general progression and betterment of the world.

Mr. Stiffkey smiled when Andrew's name was brought up to him. One of the pleasant sides of his life lay in meeting young men who would never succeed in jumping through as many hoops or such high hoops as those through which Mr. Stiffkey had jumped. It was no affair of his that Mr. Andrew Dick, for example, had small aptitude for the science of Theology. It was not even any affair of his to see that Mr. Dick bore himself well in his examination. Mr. Stiffkey was no crammer. He did not guarantee that his pupils would acquit themselves with flying colours. Those under him were sent to him in the ordinary course of events, having already decided to take up the Honour Theological School. He was paid to tell them all the things that he had learnt himself at their age; if they were possessed of his aptitude they would acquit themselves as well as he had acquitted himself; if they were not, so much the worse for them. In any case, as soon as the examination began, Mr. Stiffkey was rid of them, save, perhaps, for the tiresome but quite small matter of sending them their marks when all was over.

"Good afternoon," said Mr. Stiffkey, putting the last piece of tea-cake into his mouth, and elaborately wiping his fingers with a not very clean pocket handkerchief. "Sit down there, will you? You've brought me an essay, I think."

"Yes, sir," said Andrew, considerably less composed in manner than when he had been reclining at Sylvia's feet in the punt on the Char.

"Very good. Just read it, will you?"

So Andrew read his essay. It was dreadfully short, and dreadfully silly, and seemed all the shorter and all the sillier now that he was reading it to his tutor. He made the most of it, however, reading as slowly as possible, and lingering on the high sounding phrases. None the less, in about two minutes he came to a full stop, and looked at Mr. Stiffkey. Mr. Stiffkey was smiling—a half tolerant, half contemptuous smile.

"D'you write for the papers, Mr. Dick?" he asked.

Andrew flushed with pleasure at the compliment which he felt was coming. "Yes, sir, I write a good deal for various papers."

"I thought so. Your essay, though short, Mr. Dick, shows a certain amount of ingenuity which reveals the touch of the writer for the papers. (Mr. Stiffkey mentioned the word 'papers' in the tone of one who had heard, somewhat vaguely, of all those fluttering sheets of printed matter, but for whom they had no actual concern, living, as he did, in a world so far apart and so vastly more rarefied.) I need hardly point out to you, Mr. Dick, that you know nothing whatever about the subject, and the time of your examination is now very near. The question is, how are

you likely to fare in that examination? In the jargon of the Schools, what do you expect to get?"

"I thought perhaps I might get a Third, sir."

Mr. Stiffkey pursed up his lips. "I see very little chance of it," he said, "unless you can accomplish wonders between now and the first day of the Schools. Is it of very great importance to you to secure your degree?"

"I should certainly like to do so, sir," said Andrew, remembering Sylvia's words on the river.

"Yes, of course, but what I mean is, is it of very great importance to you as a means of earning your living after you leave Oxford?"

"Oh, no, sir. My father is very well off, and I am the only child. I shall never have to earn my own living."

"Then you are taking the Honour Schools of Theology, Mr. Dick, in much the same mood as you write for the papers—that is, just for fun."

"Well, sir, not exactly. The fact is that I have a great-aunt who is extremely anxious that I shall become a clergyman, and as she has always been rather a trump to me I don't like to disappoint the old lady."

"I see. And will your great-aunt be satisfied, Mr. Dick, if you secure nothing better than a Fourth Class, or even less than that?"

"Perfectly," said Andrew, with engaging frankness. "She'd never know the difference between a Fourth Class and a First. So long as I take a degree of some sort, and can eventually write M.A. after my name, the old lady will be as pleased as a cricket."

"In that case," replied Mr. Stiffkey, with a sudden gush of unwonted humour, "we'd better set our com-

bined wits at work to make your great-aunt as pleased as a cricket. Mr. Dick, I may tell you frankly that the only chance you have of getting anything at all in this School is to go to a coach for six hours a day, and put in another six at your own rooms. I will get into touch with a very good man—an old pupil of my own—who will be precisely the person you require. In the meantime, just take down these notes."

And Mr. Stiffkey, like the conscientious tutor he was, filled in the remainder of the hour by reading slowly from one of his fat note-books.

Sylvia and her mother left Oxford directly they heard of the solemn warning spoken by Mr. Stiffkey, having faithfully promised that Andrew's father should remain in ignorance of the exact state of affairs.

"After all," as Andrew put it, "why worry the old man? He can't do anything in the matter—it's all up to me. If I get utterly ploughed he'll know quite soon enough, and, if I scrape up a Third, he'll be no end delighted."

For the next three weeks, therefore, he worked as he had never worked in his life. Six hours of each day, Sundays excepted, were spent in the company of a rather sickly person named Glead, who had been warmly recommended to Andrew by Mr. Stiffkey. Glead was a kind of academic spider. He was perfectly at home in libraries, museums, examination-rooms, and dark stuffy places of that sort. He was the kind of person—having this in common with Mr. Stiffkey—for whom the older university systems appear to have been invented. It is impossible to think

of Glead away from Oxford—except at Cambridge. He had taken a brilliant degree himself, not from any inborn love of scholarship, and certainly not from any great mental power. Glead battened on examinations merely because he had the extraordinary faculty of being able to read the brains of the examiners. Give Glead any of the set books for any of the Schools and he would tell you, in an instant, the passages that were most likely to be given in that particular year. Part of his system, of course, was to keep a file of all papers set in such Schools as he was interested in, so that he could trace the various histories of various questions, and know precisely when a certain question or a certain passage would come full cycle.

But that was mere routine work. Lots of small crammers in Oxford could do that. Glead's specialty, as we have said, was reading into the minds of the examiners. He could not only tell you, from knowing the personalities of the men who were to examine, the questions that they would set, but he could also tell you just how these questions should be answered. Everybody who knows anything about the ancient academic systems is well aware that an examiner has as many crotchets and prejudices as an old maid in a cathedral city. It is not sufficient that the answer to a question shall be correct; it must be correct with a certain sort of correctness. It is not sufficient that the examinee has read and duly noted *some* eminent authority upon a disputed passage; it is necessary that he should have read a *certain* eminent authority on that passage, and, if the examiner himself happens to be an eminent authority on that dis-

puted passage, it is only natural that he should be pleased to come across his own views served up in the examination-paper which he is correcting.

Now Glead knew all these things. Glead knew which men had written books on which subjects. He knew, of course, everything about the men who would examine Andrew. He knew who they were, and where they lived, and what their careers had been, and who were their friends. He knew what their prejudices were; he could tick off their mental corns for you with the accuracy and precision of a cash register. That was why men went to Glead, and that was why he could exact an exorbitant fee for his time. Very few men could afford to hire Glead, but at this time of the year he worked very hard indeed, and reaped a rich harvest.

Andrew had to share his lessons with three other men who looked as though they intended to become bishops, and, by this time, are probably in a fair way to realise their ambitions. When he was not working with Glead, he would go to the Union Library, or the College Library, and hold his aching head as he endeavoured to fill his brain with the passages and chapters of which Glead would give him a list. The sun shone, the waters of the Cherwell and the Isis rippled in the summer breezes, the tennis-courts and the cricket grounds were gay with flannelled youth, the theatre was putting its best leg foremost, smoking concerts were in full swing—all the allurements of Oxford in the summer term, in fact, were spread out in tempting array before this young man who had an exceptional capacity and natural aptitude for the pleasures of life. But he thought of Sylvia, and he

thought of his father, and steadily shut his eyes to everything but the wearisome, dusty books so beloved of Stiffkey and Glead. He was too young to realise that a man may be clever in one way, and extremely stupid in another. Glead could not have written an original line to save his life, but he could read a chapter of profound disquisition on the meaning of an obscure passage in Isaiah, and remember every word of it.

Andrew patiently and pluckily worried through every line of every book recommended to him by Glead, and he had a vague sort of notion that he was acquiring a tremendous lot of information which must certainly bring him a reward in the Schools. The sad truth of the matter was quite otherwise. He read the words, and he read the foot-notes, but he might just as well have been reading the *Sportsman* for all the benefit he received from his labours.

At last the first day of the Honour School of Theology came round, and he walked down the High in a pair of old pumps, a pair of grey flannel trousers, a short black coat, a white tie, and a rather battered "square." Two or three hundred other young men, dressed in precisely the same way, and all trying to conceal the nervousness they were feeling by puffing the prohibited cigarette—prohibited because they were in academic costume—were also on their way to the Schools. About forty of them were taking the Honour Theological School; most of these were known by sight to Andrew, and he was on speaking terms with about half-a-dozen of them.

The victims assembled in the large entrance hall of the Examination Schools, and were summoned in

batches to their various rooms by the ringing of an electric bell. Whenever the bell rang, an attendant bawled out the name of the School and the number of the room. Then, with a little sickly farewell grin at their comrades, the wretched youths trooped off to wrestle with the task of committing to paper the matter with which they had been stuffing their brains for the past two years. Andrew prided himself that he was extremely cool and self-possessed, but his face was pale, though he would have been surprised to hear it, and his heart gave a curious little leap when the name of his own School was called. Off he went, up the broad stone stairway, and into a quiet room furnished with little tables, pots of ink, blotting-paper and pens. He soon found the table allotted to him, and sat down to read the paper on the English Reformation. He was glad that the examination opened with the paper on English Reformation because this subject appealed to him more, perhaps, than any other. Even old Stiffkey had not quite succeeded in squeezing all the humanity out of the English Reformation, and the learned historians over whose books he had been poring in the libraries had not been able, their supreme efforts notwithstanding, to suppress all the romance of that subtle chapter in the history of England.

Andrew soon began to write, and, because he was a born writer, his brain kindled as he worked and he wrote well. His knowledge, poor lad, was of the most meagre description, but what he lacked in knowledge he made up for in argument and imaginative detail, so that he really felt distinctly pleased with himself when he handed in his paper, and walked down

the stairs and out into the sunshine of the High. Men who were not taking any Schools that term looked at him with commiseration as he passed, and one or two men whom he knew asked him how he had got on.

"Much better than I expected," was his reply, and they wished him luck.

In the afternoon he had his paper on Isaiah, one of the special books, and again he wrote with a nimble pen and a glowing brain.

"It would really be a great scoop," he thought to himself as he went back to his rooms to read up some special passages marked for him by Glead, "if I pulled off a Third! Surely they must see that I'm not altogether a dullard, even though I may not know as much about the subjects as some of the others! After all, the object of an examination is to test a man's ability. If a man shows the ability to grasp the more leading questions put to him, that ought to make up for his lack of facts and figures and references."

Glead could have undeceived him on this point, for Glead knew his Oxford. In this Glead differed from Stiffkey, and was by so much wiser than Stiffkey. Stiffkey knew that the examination system was purely a test of the ability to learn from books, and he saw no reason to find fault with the system on that account. Glead also knew what the system meant, but he was sharp enough to realise that a test of that description was not worth a rap when applied to the conditions of life outside the university. But Glead, although he knew the worthlessness of the examination system, was far too shrewd to stand in the way of his own interests by raising a finger in Convocation for any

change in the routine. At present they all knew what they were at, but once let change and common sense creep in, and the whole academic fabric might be tumbling about their ears before they realised what they had done.

The examination was over at last and Andrew wrote as follows to Sylvia :—

"Of course, one must not be too hopeful, but I shall really be very surprised if I haven't got a Third. I'm sure I've written enough in the last few days to fill a library. Some of the questions really appealed to me, and I let myself go on them. I often thought when I was writing that it's rather a shame to destroy all the work done in the Schools. When you come to think of it, there must be a lot of stuff written that would be worth printing. I hope all this doesn't sound as if I were frightfully bucked with myself, but I can say things to you that I couldn't say to anybody else, because you know me so well, and you always understand.

"Well, nothing can be done now except wait for the *'Viva.'* I mean to enjoy the last few days of my last term, and then we'll have plenty of tennis and motoring and all sorts of fun—until the *'Viva.'*

Yours ever,—A.

"P. S. I was awfully sorry to hear about the poor old governor, but he has had these attacks before, and so I don't take them too seriously. All my love."

CHAPTER III

CONDUCT, QUITE UNWORTHY OF A HERO, IN A COLLEGE GARDEN

THOSE days of high summer between the end of term and the *viva voce* examination were long remembered by Andrew as some of the happiest in his life. The sun shone, Sylvia was his constant companion, he had done with dull text-books and examinations for ever; the future was rolled out before him like a moss-carpeted glade strewn with petals of roses.

The one grey patch in this fairylike vista was the health of his father. Years ago, in his own undergraduate days, Mr. Dick had strained his heart whilst rowing for his college, in loyal obedience to the commands of the coach on the towing path, who had bellowed to him to "kill himself." Mr. Dick had not quite killed himself, but, in his youthful and passionate desire to win the approbation of the great ones, he had brought on an attack of *angina pectoris,* with the result that he had never since been a hale and sound man. Andrew had become accustomed to his father's periodical attacks, but he could not help perceiving that Mr. Dick looked older and feebler than his age warranted.

Once or twice, moreover, it appeared to Andrew that his father had something on his mind. He seemed

to attach an altogether unnecessary importance to the result of the examination. He put some questions to his son as to his chances of taking his degree, and seemed curiously relieved when Andrew assured him that there was not the slightest cause for anxiety on that score.

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Mr. Dick, "partly because I should not like my son to fail, and also for the reason that your Aunt Ursula has so set her heart on your becoming a clergyman. As you know, the living of Tresham is in her gift, and she is undoubtedly keeping it warm for you. As livings go, it is very well worth having, and you can then get married as soon as you wish."

Andrew accepted the idea of this ready-made career with the usual equanimity of the young man with whom nothing in this world has ever gone agley. He had no irresistible craving to become the rector of Tresham, or, indeed, to become a clergyman at all, but he realised that a man must do something in this world, and he would be able to send forth many novels and plays from the peaceful seclusion of the study at Tresham Rectory. Looking round among the parsons he knew, he observed that they had a fairly good time of it in this world, whilst practically making certain of the next. They had to put in a good deal of time, of course, in preaching, praying, and visiting, but they always seemed able to make up a set at tennis, some of them rode to hounds, and all of them had their little jaunts to London, and their little holidays by the sea or on the continent.

And then there was Sylvia. That he should marry Sylvia appeared, as she herself had put it, as natural

as eating his breakfast. He was not precisely engaged to her, but that had always seemed an unnecessary formality because everybody knew that they would eventually be married. They knew the same people, they had been brought up in the same way, they liked the same things, and they thought the same thoughts. Sylvia was exactly the right height for a wife, she danced really well, played tennis well, played the piano fairly well, and sang a little. She was thoroughly healthy, wore just the right kind of clothes, and everybody liked her. The wedding would be quite a big affair, and they would have enough presents to furnish Tresham Rectory from the cellar to the attics.

Obviously, therefore, there was nothing whatever to do whilst he was waiting for his *viva* but idle away the happy days on the tennis-court, on the cricket-ground, and in the car. Some fellows believed in reading up for a *viva,* but it is hardly necessary to say that Andrew saw the folly of that. If you were ploughed, you were ploughed; no examiner would ever give you a real chance in your *viva.* It was purely a formal matter—a sort of homage that candidates had to pay to the examiners, as representatives of the University, before taking a degree. So Andrew revelled in the sunshine, made a hundred runs for the village team, got very sunburnt, and waited for the final ordeal. Even when it was over, there would be another period of waiting before the results were published.

It will be our duty, in the course of this narrative, to show Andrew Dick in various lights that the reader may consider pardonable or unpardonable according to outlook and temperament. We have so far shown

him as a fairly idle young man with a tolerably good opinion of himself. The recital of the following episode may lower him in the opinion of many whose esteem and even admiration he would wish to retain.

Andrew's college was not one of the largest in Oxford, but it could boast of possessing the most beautiful gardens of any. Originally a monastery, the lawns had been in process of careful cultivation for about five hundred years, and were now nearing perfection. There were also many beautiful trees in the garden, which was bounded on two sides by the college buildings, and at the far end by a lake. A small creek separated the private garden of the Head from the college gardens proper. The latter were open to the members of the college during the summer until nine o'clock, but at that hour a porter closed and locked an iron gate set in a stone arch, which was supposed, by the college authorities, to render the gardens immune from the visits of the junior members of the college until the porter unlocked the iron gate in the morning.

As a matter of fact—and we have the less hesitation in giving away this valuable secret because the authorities discovered it for themselves shortly after the time of which we are writing—it was possible to enter the gardens at night from a certain upper window. At the moment of our story, the set of rooms in which this useful window was situated were occupied by a rather straight-laced young man named Frankland, and it was a source of much distress to Frankland that he could never be sure when his window would be required by a party of young gentlemen who desired to take a bath in the lake by moonlight,

or, worse still, by some daring spirit who, having lost the last train from London, had come down from town on a goods train.

When Andrew went up for his *viva voce* examination, there were only three of the junior members in residence at the college. One was Frankland, who, having acquitted himself with considerable splendour in the final Honour Mathematical School, was about to take his degree. The second was a young person of the name of Jelly, whose quarters were on the far side of the college, and who had merely come up for a few days to do some packing. And the third was Andrew himself, his rooms adjoining those of the pious Frankland, temporary owner of the much-prized window.

After lunch, Andrew, feeling rather melancholy amid those echoing staircases and empty quadrangles, strolled into the gardens and seated himself on a bench beneath a weeping willow. For some minutes he thought he had the gardens to himself, but presently he became aware—by what process need not concern us—that somebody was pacing to and fro on the shaded gravel path which ran along the far side of the gardens. Through the trees Andrew caught sight of a white skirt, and a convenient opening in the foliage presently discovered to him a girl of about sixteen or seventeen years of age. She had fair hair falling to her waist, a large and quite becoming shady hat, a white dress, white stockings, and white shoes. She was apparently quite unaware of Andrew's presence in the gardens, and was pacing steadily to and fro, deep in some work of fiction bound in paper covers.

Andrew recognised the girl at once. Indeed, she was well known to the whole college, who had given her the name of Fanny the Flapper. Fanny, who had a sort of *ex officio* position in the college—to be exact, her mother was the Head's cook—had a habit of leaving the college by way of the large quadrangle when the men were assembled in the cloister for Hall, and, as she had to run the gauntlet of the whole crowd in order to pass through the main entrance, it would have been surprising indeed if she had contrived to escape notice. In term-time it was not the thing for Fanny to walk in the gardens, but, this being out of term, most rules were relaxed.

Andrew, in common with the majority of youths of his age, held it to be an essential sign of manhood to make love, in an awkward, innocent, desultory sort of way, to every pretty girl that crossed his path. His adventures, up to the present, had not been particularly thrilling, though he could hug himself with pride at the recollection of a stray kiss or two hastily implanted on the cheeks, or noses, or foreheads of various comely maidens in the neighbourhood of his father's house.

Here, however, was the promise of a more daring affair. He had never even succeeded in catching the eye of the fair Fanny, much less in speaking to her, but he had gathered, from various nods and winks and smiling reticences on the part of bolder spirits, that she was not wholly averse from any admiration that might be going. Moreover, the very rigid rules with regard to the relations of the sexes obtaining at the University lent considerable spice to the possibility

of stealing a kiss from the daughter of the Head's own cook.

Having taken a careful and guarded look to make sure that there was not a third person in the gardens, Andrew rose and made a carefully careless *détour* which brought him at last to the very path where he should not have been. The reader had her back to him at the moment, but she turned at the end of the path, and, still intent upon her inexpensive story, came towards him. Hearing his steps, she glanced up, caught Andrew's eye, looked down at her book again with a slight smile, and passed on. Having reached the further end of the path, instead of seeking shelter beneath the maternal wing, Miss Fanny again turned, and again met the strolling Andrew. This time, in reply to another smiling glance, he choked back his tremors and said, "Good afternoon." Fanny, without replying, walked on. Andrew, being nicely concealed from the college buildings by a friendly tree, thought it as well to examine the system on which the leaves were put together until Fanny again returned. When at last she approached, very deep indeed in her story, he said by way of variation:

"A lovely afternoon, isn't it?"

"Glad you think so," replied Fanny, lingering a little.

"Don't *you* think so?" asked Andrew, speaking very quickly in case, like the ghost in Hamlet, she should be off before he could stop her.

"What I think is my business," said Fanny, coming to a dead stop.

"I should like to make it my business," returned Andrew, brilliantly.

"Dessay you would."

"Well, then, may I?"

"Sauce-box!" After a little pause she added, "What are you doing up at this time of the year?"

"I'm only up for one night."

"Examination or something?"

"Yes, I've got a *viva* to-morrow morning."

"What's that?"

"Well, it means that you have to go in front of the examiners, and they ask you any questions they like."

"Oo, pore thing," said Fanny.

"Don't you pity me?"

"I don't expect you want much pity. Most of you 'Varsity chaps can take care of yerselves all right."

"What do you know about 'Varsity men?"

"That's telling, isn't it?"

"I don't suppose you've ever seen me before, have you?"

"I dessay—same as you see a fly in a swarm."

"That isn't very complimentary."

"You've come to the wrong box for compliments. I expect you've had your fair share of them."

"I expect you have, too."

"Me? What should anyone want to pay me a compliment for?"

"Because you're so pretty," said Andrew, with extreme boldness.

"Oh, pursue me!"

"You know very well you're pretty. Don't you?"

"Might pass in a crowd."

"You mustn't be too modest."

"Me modest? My word, I should like some of the girls to hear that!"

"What girls?"

"What girls! Hark at Mister Innercent! Anyone would think you'd never seen any girls in Oxford."

"I've never seen any as nice as you."

"Oh, yes, I've heard all that before. You're just like all the rest. You tell them all that, I know."

"Oh, no, I don't. I've never spoken to any other girl in Oxford except you. I mean," he added, with a little twinge of conscience as he remembered the scene on the Char, "no Oxford girl."

"Well, you haven't missed much, take my word. They're a lot of rotters, the Oxford girls. I wish we didn't have to live here."

"Where would you like to live?" asked Andrew, getting half a pace nearer to her.

"You keep yer distance!" observed Fanny, drawing back. "Suppose anyone was to come round the corner and see us talking! You'd get into a nice old pickle, and so should I."

"Well, couldn't we talk when there's nobody about?"

"When d'yer mean?"

"Why, this evening."

"My mother don't let me out evenings."

"But you could get into these gardens from the Head's garden, couldn't you?"

"Yes, *I* could, but what price you?"

"Oh," said Andrew, feeling delightfully wicked, "you leave that to me. I know a way. Will you come?"

"What time?" asked Fanny, looking down coquettishly at her book.

"About nine o'clock, after the gardens are closed?"

"I don't know. All depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On mother. All depends what she's doing. She'd half knock my head off if she knew I was meeting one of you chaps in the gardens after nine."

"Do try!"

"I shan't promise, mind."

"But you will try, won't you?"

"I might. So long."

She moved away, again intent upon her book. Andrew, excited by the adventure, and very proud of himself, went off to kill time by looking at the papers at the Union. In the smoking-room at the Union he had the luck to run across the pious Frankland, and at once led up to the loan of Frankland's window. Frankland, after three years' experience of that window, had become fairly hardened to the wickedness of his fellows, but now he showed a certain amount of obstinacy. He pointed out that there were only three men in residence, and, in the event of Andrew being caught with Fanny in the gardens, he himself might be implicated for having connived at this breach of rules. At length, however, Andrew managed to talk him over, and it was agreed that Frankland should leave the window open, but take no other share in the escapade. In the event of trouble, his defence would be that he was not in his rooms when Andrew left for the appointment, and that he was fast asleep when Andrew returned.

Andrew allowed the porter ten minutes' grace. Then he lowered himself from Frankland's window on to a small, sloping roof some five feet below it; from this roof he lowered himself again on to the sill of a

ground-floor window; from that stage he jumped to the ground. Proceeding very cautiously, he presently espied Fanny on a seat beneath a weeping willow. The position was not very well chosen, for the willow faced the creek dividing the college gardens from the Head's private garden. However, a half-gloom enveloped everything, and young lovers invariably leave a great deal to the goddess of Chance.

"So you've come," said Andrew, seating himself within about a yard of Fanny.

"Looks like it," she replied.

"You managed to dodge your mother?"

"I shouldn't be here if I hadn't, silly."

"I'm very glad you did."

"I don't know as I am."

"Why not? Don't you like being with me?"

"Oh, you 'Varsity chaps are all very well in yer way."

"What sort of a way's that?"

"You know well enough."

Andrew edged a few inches nearer. "No, I don't, really. Won't you tell me?" And he stole another three inches.

"I reckon you do."

"But I swear I don't. We're not all alike, you know."

"Not much difference, and chance it."

Andrew, by this time, was quite close to her. Her hair brushed his cheek. He put his arm round her waist, and kept it there, despite some feeble resistance.

"Give me a kiss," he whispered.

Fanny giggled.

"Will you?" persisted Andrew.

"What for?" said Fanny, and giggled again.

"Because I want one."

"People can't have everything they want in this world."

"But I can have this, and I'm going to."

"I know you're not, then."

"I know I am."

She wriggled away from him, but he caught her by the wrist and dragged her quite close to him. Fanny was still giggling, and the giggles became a suppressed shriek as Andrew flung both arms about her and pressed his lips against her cheek.

At that very instant they were both nearly startled out of their wits by the sudden sound of a third voice, high-pitched and angry.

"Fanny! What are you doing there? You little devil! I'll break every bone in yer body! And I'll go straight to the Head and tell him—that I will! I don't care who the gentleman is! I'll go straight to the Head and tell him all about it! You see if I don't."

Andrew, at the first sound of the mother's voice, had instantly released Fanny and darted behind a bush. Fanny, for her part, raised her voice and shouted back at her mother.

"There isn't anybody here! I'm all by myself! That's the truth, mother! There's isn't anybody here!"

They both screamed so loudly that it seemed to Andrew quite likely that the Head himself, if he happened to be at home, would presently appear upon the scene. There was only one thing to be done—he must make an ignominious bolt for it. Leaving the friendly bush and the two screaming females behind

him, therefore, he ran as fast as his legs would carry him to the point at which he had entered the gardens, sprang upon the lowest window sill, from thence to the little sloping roof—and there he stuck. Try as he would, he could not quite raise himself to the level of Frankland's window.

"Frankland!" he called. "Frankland! Hallo! Frankland!"

The head of Frankland appeared peeping out at him.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't get up! You must give me a hand!"

"Half a jiffey! I'll hand you a chair."

Presently a chair was cautiously lowered, and with the help of this Andrew was soon in Frankland's bedroom, and had drawn up the chair after him. He was white and breathless, as well he might be. Frankland stared at him in speechless terror.

"We were caught!" gasped Andrew.

"Caught? Who by?"

"By her mother." Andrew then gave Frankland a faithful account of the incident exactly as it had occurred.

"What shall you do," he asked Frankland, "if there is any enquiry about it?"

"I shall say that I've been alone in my rooms all the evening."

"But that will absolutely put me in the cart! I know Jelly has gone to the 'Queen's' for dinner, and he won't be in yet."

"I can't help that," said Frankland, stubbornly. "I can't afford to run the risk of getting into any scrape. They might stop me taking my degree, and I'm going

to a tutorship the day after to-morrow. I can't run the risk of losing that."

"But nobody wants you to run any risk. Can't you say that I was with you all the time?"

"That would be a lie," said Frankland. "I don't want to leave the 'Varsity with a lie on my conscience."

Andrew was in such a state of nerves that he hardly knew what he was talking about. Every moment he expected to receive a summons to appear before the Head. Every moment he expected to hear that awful angry mother's voice screaming from the quad. One course of action alone was open to him. Without another word to Frankland, he hurried across the passage, shut his door, tore off his clothes and jumped into bed.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH EVENTS MOVE RATHER RAPIDLY

WHEN Andrew awoke next morning, he had at first a vague consciousness of some black cloud hanging over him. This vagueness lasted for a few seconds only; then he remembered that loud grating voice at the other side of the creek, and wondered what the upshot of the adventure would be. It was quite possible that the Cook would postpone her complaint to the Head until the morning, in which case he might receive a summons to appear before the dread presence at any moment.

He had to be at the Schools by ten o'clock. His plans were soon formed. There was not the slightest chance of Frankland getting into the scrape—his excellently pious character was too well-known. Jelly had no character to speak of, but the porter would be able to prove that Jelly was out of college at the time of the incident. If nothing happened, therefore, before Andrew left the college to go down to the Schools, there was no reason why anything should happen at all. He would pack his bag, and leave instructions with the scout to send it down to the station. The cap and gown presented some difficulties, but he could easily proceed in them to the station after his *viva,* and change in the waiting-room.

He made a poor breakfast, and was certainly not in the frame of mind to do himself credit before the examiners. He walked across the quad with as careless an air as possible, but every moment he expected to hear a footstep behind him, or to hear his name called. But he gained the street without interruption of any kind.

The ordeal of the *viva voce* examination in an Honour School is rendered the more terrifying by the fact that they are not held in private. The other candidates, for example, are in the room, waiting their turn, and any member of the university with sufficient curiosity may also attend this distressing function. At any rate, that was the rule in Andrew's day, but, fortunately for him, the audience on this particular occasion was limited to his fellow-candidates and one or two of their friends.

One candidate was sitting at a small table in a corner of the room busily writing. Andrew had heard that the examiners occasionally gave a man a little more paper-work, and he prayed very earnestly that this fate was not in store for him. He had had his fill of writing on subjects about which he knew nothing.

His fears were quite groundless. When his name was called, a slight but dignified smile appeared on the faces of the three examiners sitting at the long table. One of them indicated a chair that faced him on the other side of the table, and Andrew sat down. A moment before he had been trembling; now he felt ready for whatever might befall.

"Can you tell me," asked the examiner, "in what connection Isaiah refers to the Arabians?"

Andrew, of course, had not the remotest idea in what connection Isaiah referred to the Arabians. He discovered later that Isaiah does not refer to the Arabians at all by that name. At the actual moment, the one thought in his mind was that he must say something, and say it quickly. There came into his mind the name of a song. The song was entitled "My Arab Steed," and it used to be sung by a maiden lady of somewhat eccentric habits who occasionally visited at Andrew's home when he was a child. He could see the poor lady sitting at the piano, and he could hear a high, thin, tremulous voice weakly acclaiming the virtues of her Arab steed. He remembered that he used to wonder what she would look like on an Arab steed, and told himself that he had never seen anybody less likely to mount and control a steed of any description, least of all a full-blooded Arab steed.

All these things passed through his mind in the second that elapsed after the examiner had put the question. The examiner was looking at Andrew rather whimsically, and Andrew was looking at him. The other two examiners had stopped writing and were also looking at Andrew with the same whimsical smile. If a dustman had suddenly left his cart in the street and wandered into the room to be examined they would have looked at him in much the same way.

"He says," replied Andrew, easily, "that the Arabians were noted for the excellence of their cavalry."

The smile on the faces of the examiners deepened a little. Then the one who had put the question bowed

gravely and said, "Thank you, Mr. Dick. I need not detain you any longer."

So it was over. Andrew picked up his "square" and walked lightly and collectedly from the room. He thought it more than a little absurd to bring a man all the way up to Oxford for the sake of asking him one question. Still, that was part of the academic system. The great point was that the whole thing was over, and he was free to return to home and Sylvia. The result of the examination would not be published for some little time.

He found two doctors in the house when he reached home. His father had been taken suddenly ill with a more than usually severe heart attack the previous night, and the local doctor had sent to London for a specialist. For three days Andrew lived in a state of wretched suspense. In the middle of the third night he was summoned to his father's bedside. The doctor and the nurse warned him that the end was at hand.

Andrew went close to the bedside. Seeing that his father wished to speak to him, he leaned down and held his ear close to the feeble lips.

"What about the exam?" asked Mr. Dick.

"It's all right," replied Andrew.

"What have they given you?"

"A Third," said Andrew. He would have told a much greater lie than that to ease the last moments of one to whom he was deeply attached.

"Thank God," said Mr. Dick, and a little later he passed away.

It was not until after the funeral that Andrew discovered the reason for his father's anxiety over the examination. The family lawyer then informed him that Mr. Dick's affairs were in a very serious state indeed; in point of fact, Andrew would have nothing.

It took the boy some little time to realise what the lawyer was talking about. He had never given a serious thought in his life to the question of money. His father had always supplied his needs, and Andrew had seldom been sufficiently extravagant to raise a paternal protest. As he had told Mr. Stiffkey, he had never dreamt that he would have to work for his living, and now he certainly could not comprehend in full the meaning of what had happened to him.

His sole remaining hope was Aunt Ursula, and Aunt Ursula's favour depended on the result of the examination. If he were able to get his degree, that would lead quite naturally to his taking Holy Orders, and so to the very excellent living of Tresham. If, on the other hand, the examiners, for some obscure reason, chose to decide against him, he knew enough of Aunt Ursula's nature to guess that she would wreak her revenge by having nothing more to do with hi

There was nothing to do but to wait in the silent house, where the local auctioneer was already appraising the various articles of furniture, and callously dividing the late Mr. Dick's possessions into "Lots." Sylvia was a good friend in these days. Sylvia's mother, of course, took quite a complacent view of the whole situation.

"You must always remember," she said to Andrew, "that your father was a great sufferer. I am quite sure that everything has happened for the best. The

night is darkest before dawn. Every cloud has a silver lining. Troubles are often blessings in disguise. It's a long lane that has no turning, Andrew, and we must always look on the bright side. I'm afraid the carpets aren't in a very good state of repair, but the oak sideboard in the dining-room is really a beauty, and is sure to fetch a good sum. If those dreadful dealers don't run it up too much, I shall very likely buy it myself; in fact, there are several things I should like to buy, and then you can have them again when you set up house. It's a poor heart that never rejoices, and it's no use trying to lock the stable door after the horse has gone. The silver must certainly be bought in because it has your family crest on it, but the piano is quite out of date, and may as well go. Yes, I always remind people who are in affliction that we never know what to-morrow may bring forth; it's a great comfort to think of things like that."

It was Sylvia who brought the news of the result of the examination. She had found the list in the *Morning Post,* and at once cycled over.

"Hallo," said Andrew, with a somewhat forlorn attempt to carry out all Mrs. Kesterton's maxims.

"Have you seen it?" asked Sylvia.

"Seen what?"

"The result of your examination?"

Andrew suddenly felt that curious detachment which would seem to be one of Nature's provisions in crises. "No," he said; "is it out?"

"Haven't you seen your paper this morning?"

"Yes, but I didn't notice anything."

"The list is in the *Morning Post.*"

"Well?"

"You haven't got your Third," said Sylvia.

"What have I got?"

"You haven't got a Fourth, either."

"What is it? A Gulf?"

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap, but it isn't even a Gulf."

Andrew laughed. "Just a measly Group?"

"Of course it may be a mistake, but they haven't even given you a Group."

"Nothing whatever?"

"Your name isn't in the list at all. Here you are. I cut it out." She handed him a little slip of paper, and Andrew read it through. Then he twisted it into a pellet and flung it away. "Thank God, that's all done with," he said.

"It's awfully sporting of you to take it like this."

"I mean it. I was being forced to do a frightfully shabby thing. If I'd taken my degree I should have had to go in for all that parson business, and accept Aunt Ursula's rotten old living. I should have hated myself as a humbug, and a liar, and a hypocrite. Every time I put on my surplice I should have loathed myself more and more, and that would have a pretty bad effect on a chap, I should think. Now I've done with all that. I've got absolutely nothing in the world but my brains, and it's up to me to win through. I shall do it, you know."

Sylvia turned away. There were tears in her eyes, and she did not want Andrew to see them. And there was something else in her eyes—something that had never been there before. She knew now that she was in love with Andrew—in love with him because

he was all alone in the world and needed love so badly. She admired him for his courage; every word that he had uttered vibrated in her heart. But it was not his courage or his translucent honesty that had suddenly made her fall in love with him; it was just his absolute loneliness.

"What's the matter?" he asked, stepping up to her and laying his hands on her shoulders. "You're not crying, are you?"

"No," said Sylvia.

"Yes, you are." He turned her round and tried to look into her eyes, but she would not let him. "What are you crying for? Can't you see how splendid it all is? I can do as I like, now. I am my own master, and nobody can interfere with me."

"What will you do?"

"Do? Write, of course."

"But isn't that awfully precarious?"

"That's just the fun of it. If I had become the Rector of Tresham, I should have had my four meals a day with the utmost precision and regularity, and never had the adventure of earning one of them. Now I've got to earn every single meal I have, and I've got to earn it before I have it, and I mean to do it! I know what I can do. I know I can make my living as a journalist. I've been paid for things, and that shows that I can write things worth paying for. If I can write one I can write fifty or a hundred. I shall go up to London and get one very cheap room, and I shall call on every editor in town. I may never become rich or famous, but I'm absolutely certain to make quite a decent income, and then I shall join a club, and go to all the theatres and have a splendid

time. I might even write a play. D'you realise that it's possible to make a fortune out of one play? I saw in a paper that the chap who wrote 'Charley's Aunt' had made sixty thousand pounds out of it! I could write just as good a farce as 'Charley's Aunt.'"

The tears were coming again to Sylvia's eyes, but this time she was ashamed of them because they were for herself, not for him. There was no place for her in this catalogue of splendours. Andrew could go away into the world and fight the world, but she must stay behind in this dull village and content herself with his letters. Perhaps he would forget all about her. At first he would remember, and his letters would be fairly frequent, but London was full of brilliantly clever and wonderfully beautiful girls, and he would be sure to meet some of them, and almost sure to fall in love with one of them. She felt that he had it in him to succeed, but it was rather hard, after all, that he should succeed away from her, without her help.

He must have seen from her face what was passing in her mind. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he seized both her hands.

"I say," he exclaimed, "wouldn't it be topping if we could go up to town together?"

"Don't be silly," said Sylvia, with rather a wan little smile.

"But it would! It would be tremendous fun to keep house and cook our own dinner! Let's risk it, shall we?"

Sylvia shook her head. "I don't want to depress you, old boy, but it would be madness for you to try to keep two people when you can't be sure of being

able to keep one. I should only be in your way. Besides——"

"Well?"

"You won't be huffy, will you?"

"Of course not. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say that mother would feel bound to make me an allowance, and I don't think that would be very nice for you, would it?"

"I never thought of that," said Andrew. "No, that would be rotten. I want to do it all myself. Well, we'll see what happens. As soon as all the business here is settled up, I shall go up to town and get to work. How much do you think I ought to be making before we can get married?"

"I don't quite know, but I feel it would be as well to put the whole idea out of your head for the present."

"I haven't the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort. You're not going to chuck me, are you?"

"Andrew!"

"Very well, then. We can get married perfectly well on five hundred a year. As soon as I can prove to you that I am making money at the rate of five hundred a year, I shall come back and expect you to marry me."

"No," said Sylvia. "You really must be more practical. Just because you made five hundred in one year it wouldn't follow that you could make five hundred the next year. You ought to give yourself at least two years before you think of getting married, and you ought to have a good sum of money in the bank in case you got ill or anything."

"Two years?" cried Andrew. "But two years is a

tremendous time! I expect somebody else would have come along and snapped you up by that time."

"I'm not so easily snapped up. All the same, I won't be engaged to you."

"In case you meet somebody you like better?"

"No, in case you meet somebody you like better."

"That's absolutely out of the question."

"Is it?" Sylvia laughed.

"Absolutely. But I'll tell you what we ought to do; we ought to make a compact. If I meet anybody I like better, I'll write and tell you so, and you must promise to do the same."

"Yes, I'll promise that." And so they left it.

By the first post next morning came the expected letter from Aunt Ursula.

"My dear Andrew," she wrote, "I have just read the result of your examination in the *Times*. I need not tell you how bitterly disappointed I am in you. It may be news to you that I assisted your father very considerably with your college expenses, and I did this because I felt that you might one day become a worthy and useful worker in the Church of England. But now, owing to your laziness and self-indulgence, that hope has been shattered, and all the money has been thrown away. I do not wish to write more harshly than I can help when you are still suffering from your recent bereavement, but I feel it my duty to point out to you that you are one of life's failures. I fear that you will never do any good in the world, and you must not expect me to waste any more money upon you. There are others who need it as much and deserve it more. I am, Your affectionate Aunt, Ursula."

CHAPTER V

ANDREW MEETS THREE EDITORS AND RECEIVES THREE SHOCKS

WHEN the house and furniture had been sold, and all his father's creditors disposed of, Andrew found himself in possession of fifteen pounds, a very fair supply of decent clothes (obtained at Oxford, and, of course, unpaid for), a few books, a tennis racquet, a bat, and a bicycle. He sold the bicycle on his own account to a local dealer, and thus brought his capital to nineteen pounds. The bat and the tennis racquet he left in Sylvia's keeping; his clothes he packed into a couple of suit cases, and forthwith plunged into the whirlpool called London.

From force of habit he drove from the railway-station to a large hotel in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Never having enquired the price of a room in his life before taking it, he was shown into a splendid apartment with a fine view of the Thames, the Embankment, and St. Paul's Cathedral. Ten minutes later he went down in the lift to the writing-room, wrote letters to the editors of three penny weekly papers which had severally accepted three of his articles, and sent them off at once by District Messenger. In the letters he reminded the editors that he had contributed to their papers, made known to them the very important fact that he had now come to London to

place the whole of his time at their disposal, and asked for an interview.

He then put on his hat, walked along the Embankment as far as Arundel Street, turned up into the Strand, and walked through Fleet Street to Ludgate Circus. Andrew felt very proud to think that, by merely taking the train to London and engaging a room at an hotel, he had become at one bound a London journalist. He had a vague idea that he ought to be a little bit dissipated in order to adapt himself for the great part he was to play in the affairs of the world, and so he thrust open the door of a public-house, somewhat roughly, and found himself in the midst of a number of unshaven, rather shabby, and rather dirty-looking men. He realised that these could not possibly be journalists, but would not withdraw from the adventure. With a vivid blush spreading over his quite clear and admirably healthy young face, he politely asked a young lady with unnatural hair and complexion for a whisky and soda.

"Scotch or Irish?" she asked, yawning a little.

"Scotch, please."

As he had failed to name his particular brand, she gave him some vile stuff known as "our special," dashed some cheap, lukewarm soda into it, pushed it across the sloppy counter and said, "Tenpence, please."

One or two of the unshaven men winked at each other, but Andrew did not see that. He paid over his tenpence, swallowed the filthy mixture, lighted a cigarette, and stalked out into the street again as though he were accustomed to spend the greater part of his day pushing in and out of public houses. He stopped in front of several windows which displayed copies

of the journal for the day, and read a few lines, trying to look as careless and as bored as might be. Then he walked back through the Strand to his hotel, wrote a long letter to Sylvia, dressed, dined, and went to the Empire.

He had been to the Empire once before—on Boatrace Night. On that occasion he had achieved the glorious distinction of being pushed down the steps into the street by a huge attendant—an achievement which had covered him with no little glory on his return to Oxford. He now found the promenade very dull by comparison, and wished he had gone to see a play instead. But he comforted himself with the reflection that he was behaving very much like a man of the world, and stayed until almost the last turn. Then he went back to his hotel and his luxurious apartment.

The first post in the morning brought him replies from the three editors. Whether they had been impressed by the name of the hotel that headed the notepaper, or whether they were captivatd by Andrew's impudence in writing to them at all, or whether they remembered his contribution to their columns, the important point is that they all expressed themselves as being willing to grant him an interview.

The first letter he opened was from Mr. Socrates Quain, the Editor of "Rosemary," a miscellany of fiction, useful hints, and good advice cleverly calculated to appeal to a very large number of young women. Mr. Quain would see Mr. Dick at eleven o'clock.

The second was from Mr. James Keep, Editor of that famous journal for the home, "Golden Glints."

Mr. Keep would see Mr. Andrew Dick at three o'clock.

The third was from Mr. Douglas Campbell, Editor of that other famous journal for the home, "Doy's Weekly." Mr. Campbell would see Mr. Dick between four and five.

As he opened one letter after the other, Andrew felt that the world was his. That very day he was to meet and converse with three men who could, and doubtless would, set him without delay on the high-road to success. The mere fact that the appointments did not clash was a good omen. It was clever of him, he reflected, not to have aimed too high at first. The time would come, of course, when he would be making appointments with the Editors of the great dailies; but first of all he must gain his experience. He had not contributed as yet to the great dailies, but he had contributed to, and been paid by, "Rosemary," "Golden Glints," and "Doy's Weekly."

Having always heard of the value of first impressions, he went down to the barber's shop in the basement of the hotel, and had his hair cut and very carefully brushed. Then he went out and bought himself a new hat, a new pair of gloves, and a smart cane. The three magic letters were in his pocket; it was utterly inconceivable that he should not come to terms with one of these three potentates. It would be rather awkward, perhaps, if they all offered him positions; still, as reasonable men, they would understand that he could not very well cut himself into three parts. He would soften the shock of disappointment as far as possible, and rely upon their breadth of mind not to bear him any ill-will.

Mr. Socrates Quain was quite unlike Andrew's con-

ception of an Editor. He was rather short, rather stout, and spoke as little as possible. When he did say anything, he said it with the utmost deliberation, rather as though he expected that it would be taken down and used in evidence against him.

"Good morning," said Andrew, briskly and breezily.

Mr. Socrates Quain did not answer, but merely looked at Andrew without the slightest expression on his plump, clean-shaven face.

"You very kindly said that I might call upon you," Andrew reminded him.

Mr. Socrates Quain gently nodded.

"I have come to London to take up journalism," continued Andrew. "I have done a good deal of writing, one way and another. You will perhaps remember that you accepted an article of mine on 'Girls at the University.' "

Mr. Socrates Quain parted his lips a little, but otherwise made no response.

"I should like to obtain a post as sub-editor, or something of that sort," explained Andrew, feeling, for the first time, that the career he had chosen was not going to be so easy as he had imagined.

Mr. Socrates Quain at last spoke—very slowly, very thoughtfully. Every syllable had its own value.

"We don't care for University men in this office."

Andrew was startled. He could not remember whether he had told Mr. Quain in his letter from the hotel that he had been to Oxford, but he had certainly expected that the fact of his having been there would help him considerably in getting what he wanted.

"I beg your pardon?"

"We don't care for University men in this office,"

repeated Mr. Quain. He pronounced this judgment a second time at precisely the same pace, and in precisely the same manner. There was no hesitation or budging about him. What he had said he had said. Had he not been very sure of the truth of it, he would not have said it.

"Might I ask why?" replied Andrew, a whole series of misgivings beginning to surge through him, and take the youthful assurance out of him.

There was a long silence, and then Mr. Socrates Quain gave forth this astounding piece of information.

"We don't want young men who write. We want young men who can sweep out the office and do up parcels."

"All right!" exclaimed Andrew. "I'm quite ready to sweep out the office and do up parcels."

"Have you ever done any sweeping?"

"No, but I could soon learn."

"No, you couldn't. You can't learn to sweep after you've learnt Greek and Latin. And you can't learn to do up parcels after you've learnt Euclid and Algebra. We want young men who have never learnt anything except sweeping and doing up parcels."

Unseen by Andrew, he pressed an electric button beneath his desk. The door opened, and an office-boy appeared who handed Andrew his hat.

Staggered, puzzled, and very much ashamed, Andrew took the new hat, the new gloves, and the new cane, and stumbled, blushing, down the stairs and out into the street.

What on earth did the man mean? Of course, Mr. Quain didn't expect to be taken literally; but, after all,

a paper had to be written, and the stories and articles had to be read, and sub-edited, and titled. If he had meant that University men were above their business, it was hardly fair to lump them all together in that way. For his part, Andrew was quite prepared to sweep the floor, or to do up parcels, or anything else that would get him a footing in an office. Well, there were still Mr. James Keep and Mr. Douglas Campbell.

Mr. Keep was that curious anomaly, a serious Irishman. Andrew was not quite so ignorant as to imagine that all Irishmen continually waved sticks in the air and danced jigs, but he was certainly not prepared for a man with a soft Irish accent and the demeanour of a judge sentencing a man to be hanged. He had taken the precaution to leave the new hat, and the new gloves, and the new stick behind him; he felt that he had made a mistake in introducing these tokens of a lighter and a gayer world to the somewhat oppressive atmosphere of Fleet Street. Mr. Keep, at any rate, should never suspect that he was an Oxford man.

He was gaining experience, and gaining it very quickly.

"Pray sit down," said Mr. Keep. "You wish to become a journalist, Mr. Dick?"

"I am very anxious to take up regular journalism," said Andrew. "I have already done a good deal of writing, including an article for your own paper."

"What was the subject of that article?" asked Mr. Keep.

"It was called, 'Dons on Wheels.' It was a sort of

semi-humorous article on the popularity of the bicycle at Oxford."

"The profession of journalism," said Mr. Keep, "is a very serious one, Mr. Dick. It is not to be entered upon by any young man who has the facility for stringing sentences together. It requires great patience, great diligence, a great faculty for observing the public, a keen appreciation of the tastes of the public, and an almost supernatural appetite for the topic of the moment. I doubt very much, Mr. Dick, whether you possess all these qualities. Unfortunately, my experience of you young gentlemen from Oxford and Cambridge has not been particularly happy. You all want to educate the public; the aim of my paper is to interest them, and to amuse them. You want to express your wonderful ideas, to clothe your thoughts in high-flown language, to emulate the great writers in whose works you have been steeping yourselves for the past seven years or so. That is not what we want in this office, Mr. Dick."

"I'm quite willing to write anything that you wish," said poor Andrew, feeling as though he had now plumbed the depths of self-humiliation, and would never again be able to look Sylvia in the face.

"I have no doubt you are," replied Mr. Keep, "but that's no good to me, Mr. Dick. I have no time to feed young men with ideas; I expect them to bring ideas to me. I have no time to tell you what to write; a journalist should know what the Editor wants, and be ready to supply him with it at half-an-hour's notice. I am very sorry that you should be disappointed, but I fear that you have been trained in the wrong school. Of course I shall be happy to read any

article that you may care to submit to me. Good afternoon."

Two arrows had now been shot; both had failed utterly to hit the target; one remained in his quiver. Andrew hurried back to the hotel, put on his oldest suit and a cap, and left behind him even the rather worn pair of gloves that had accompanied him to the offices of "Golden Glints." He thought the waiters and hall-porter looked rather surprised and shocked as he hurried past them in this shabby attire, but the great prize was still dangling before his eyes, and he would have gone to any length to be able to grasp it. His ideas had changed since the morning. He no longer dreamed of a room of his own, and a sub-editorial chair, and a pile of manuscripts upon which to pass judgment; he was now prepared to accept anything, to do anything, rather than confess himself beaten.

Besides, what else could he do? There was nobody in the world to whom he could turn for assistance. His aunt Ursula had given him to understand, in the most definite manner, that there was nothing to be expected from her; in any case, he would rather have starved than ask anything from her after her letter. There was Sylvia, of course, and Sylvia's mother; but how could he possibly humble himself by confessing to two women, one of whom he hoped to make his wife, that his brains were worth nothing in the market of London?

Mr. Douglas Campbell was a much older man than either Mr. Quain or Mr. Keep. He kept Andrew waiting quite half-an-hour in a very small and very gloomy waiting-room; indeed, he might have forgotten him

altogether had not Andrew slipped a sixpence into the hand of an office-boy, and asked him to remind Mr. Campbell of the existence of his visitor.

Mr. Campbell adopted the paternal attitude. After listening to Andrew's introductory remarks—Andrew seemed to himself to have been repeating the same sentences all day long—Mr. Campbell delivered himself as follows:

"Now, Mr. Dick, let me give you one piece of advice. You say that you want to be a journalist, and that you have written an article for this paper, and that I have printed it and paid you for it. Don't be led away by that solitary instance to imagine that you were born to be a journalist. I have been a journalist myself for five-and-thirty years, and I can assure you that if I had my time over again I would take up any other profession rather than the profession of journalism. The prizes are very few, and the number of those who go under is very great. I can give you scores of instances out of my own experience, but I will spare you that. What I say to you is this —go back to your friends, and tell them that you have changed your mind—tell them anything you like—and ask them to help you to enter the profession for which you were educated. Men of your stamp are as plentiful in Fleet Street as pebbles on the seashore; they begin by meaning well, but they haven't got the right sort of stuff in them to make a success in Fleet Street. They may be clever, they may be able to write, they may even be hard-working; but these things are not everything. If you had come to me when you were fifteen or sixteen years of age, I might have made something of you. Instead of that, you have come

to me after wasting some of the best years of your youth at a place like Oxford—it may be Cambridge, but I can see it's either one or the other—and then you expect me to teach you things that that office-boy who brought in your card knows backwards. I haven't got the time for it, and that's the whole truth of the matter. Send me as many articles as you like, and I will undertake to read them, but don't expect me to give you a job in the office, because I can't do it, and I shouldn't be consulting the interests of my directors if I did. Good afternoon."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH A LITTLE LAMB, HAVING STRAYED INTO A DEN OF WOLVES, IS DELIGHTED WITH HIS NEW FRIENDS

THAT night, Andrew wrote as follows to Sylvia:

"You will be pleased to hear that I am getting on extremely well. To-day, for instance, I have made the acquaintance of no less than three Editors—real live Editors, all of whom 'expressed their willingness' to consider any work that I cared to submit. You must own that I have not let very much grass grow under my feet. Of course I shall bombard them with articles, and I have very little doubt that an editorial appointment will follow.

"I think it might be as well to look out for a rather less expensive residence than this one. I don't know yet what they are charging me here, but I should think it would be more economical to take a room somewhere, so don't be surprised if there is a different address on my next letter.

"I have made a most interesting discovery. It seems that London Editors are not at all impressed by the fact that one has been to Oxford or Cambridge; in fact, to put it plainly, they have discovered that 'Varsity men, as a rule, are no good. I did my best to conceal the fact that I had been to Oxford when I was talking to Douglas Campbell, the Editor of 'Doy's

Weekly,' but he must be a shrewd old chap because he found it out for himself. Do you really think there is such a thing as an Oxford manner? It seems impossible, but if there is, and I've got it, the sooner I get rid of it the better.

"London is frightfully fascinating, and I look forward tremendously to the day when you and I will have a jolly little flat somewhere, and I shall be the Editor of a well-known paper. I am just as confident as ever that that day will come. I had a good look at some of the chaps who are employed in those offices, and most of them seemed very ordinary individuals. They all had their coats off, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they were working frightfully hard. I should work frightfully hard if I got my chance. Editors here seem to think that Oxford men are afraid of work, but I'm not a bit afraid of the right sort of work—the work I know that I can do.

"Now I must knock off and write an article. I think of you all the time, and am always picturing you in the village and on the lawn at your house. Let me have a very long letter by return, but don't tell me anything about our old place, or the bounders who have bought it.

"All my love."

Andrew wrote an article that night, and sent it to Mr. James Keep together with a stamped addressed envelope in case it should not happen to suit Mr. Keep. The next morning he gave up his room at the hotel, and asked for his bill. The amount rather startled him. When he had paid the bill he found himself in possession of thirteen pounds, instead of nineteen. He had been living at the rate of three

pounds a day, including his new hat, his new stick, his new gloves, and his seat at the Empire. Obviously, this would not do. Fresh quarters, and economical ones at that, must be found without delay.

Leaving his luggage at the hotel for the time being, he walked under Hungerford Bridge, up Villiers Street, and turned off into John Street. A rather nice flat on Adelphi Terrace took his fancy, and he enquired the probable rent of a man who was painting some railings near by.

"Them 'ahses?" replied the painter. "I reckon they run as near four 'undred a year as dammit."

"Thank you," said Andrew, and walked on.

Presently he found himself in Buckingham Street, and noticed a card in a window signifying that there were furnished apartments to be let within. He rang the bell, and was told to wait in the passage whilst the servant fetched Mrs. Doubikin. Whilst he was waiting, a huge man came out of a room on the ground floor with three or four telegrams in his hand. He opened the telegrams in a casual manner, in each case staring hard at Andrew as he ripped up the flaps. In each case, also, he threw the envelopes on the floor. Andrew noticed that the floor was strewn with yellow envelopes. He had never seen so many telegraph-envelopes in his life. Having glanced carelessly at the wires, the huge man laboriously climbed the stairs, entered a room on the first floor, and slammed the door behind him.

Mrs. Doubikin came slowly and pantingly up the kitchen stairs. She was a very stout woman, very short of breath, with a pleasant, motherly manner. Having succeeded in reaching the passage where

Andrew was waiting, she sat down on a chair which seemed to have been put there for the purpose, placed her hands on her hips, and gasped out, "It's me 'eart, sir! Don't you take no notice! It's on'y me 'eart!"

Andrew waited until she had recovered a little. He had heard of people dying of joy, and he did not wish to kill Mrs. Doubikin by announcing suddenly that he had come to take a room from her at the lowest possible price.

"Yes," she said, "I do 'appen to 'ave a room vacint, but it's not what you might call very smart. It's at the top of the 'ouse—fourth floor front. Why not go up with Jane and 'ave a look at it? I'd come with yer meself if it wasn't fer me 'eart. If yer don't 'appen to like the room, there's no 'arm done."

Andrew accordingly climbed the stairs with Jane, and looked at the room. Mrs. Doubikin had not been guilty of undue modesty when she warned him that the room was not smart. To be exact, it was a servant's attic, very small, with a sloping roof—beneath which the bed had been pushed—a tiny little fireplace, a floor composed mainly of boards that danced up and down as you trod on them, paper of a very cheap variety peeling off the walls, a few sticks of broken and dirty furniture, and a strip or two of oilcloth. The room, however, in Andrew's eyes had two redeeming features. It was pretty sure to be cheap, and it was situated in the heart of London. By poking his head out of the window he could see the river—the same glorious Thames that he had been gazing upon from his magnificent apartment at the large hotel. True, he could not see very much of it, but

the Thames was the Thames, and London was London. He had decided in his own mind to take the room long before he and Jane reached the ground floor.

Mrs. Doubikin, still panting, though not so heavily, was still sitting in the chair near the front door.

"'Ave yer seen it?" she asked.

"Yes," said Andrew.

"Will it soot?"

"I think so. How much d'you charge?"

Mrs. Doubikin looked him over, and remembered her duty to Mr. Doubikin.

"The charge for that room," she said, "is ten shillings a week."

"That is quite satisfactory."

"Then there'll be two shillings a week for attendance," added Mrs. Doubikin.

This seemed quite fair to Andrew. One could not expect people to be constantly climbing up to the fourth floor and down again without paying them for it.

"And there's a shilling a week for lights," added Mrs. Doubikin.

"Certainly," said Andrew.

"And firing will be so much the scuttle—if you should 'appen to want a fire."

"I quite understand," said Andrew.

"And I make a charge of a shilling a day for breakfast. That's the only meal we serve in the 'ouse. All my lodgers 'ave breakfast together in this room." She jerked her thumb over her shoulder, indicating a door that faced Andrew.

"Quite so," he said.

"Then when will yer be movin' in?" asked Mrs. Doubikin, with great briskness.

"I should like to move in at once. I will have my things sent across from the hotel."

At the word "hotel" Mrs. Doubikin pricked up her ears, let them down again, and sighed. Had she only known that the young man was staying at an hotel, she would have done her duty by Mr. Doubikin even more thoroughly. Still, there were always little ways in which honest and God-fearing folk could come by their own, even if folks *had* settled the terms and moved in.

As soon as his possessions had been carried up to the attic, Andrew went round to the nearest stationers and bought a bottle of ink, a pen, a box of nibs, some blotting-paper, a packet of long envelopes, and a large quantity of scribbling paper. He carried them back with him to the attic, and at once sat down and began an article for Mr. Socrates Quain. It was a little awkward to keep Oxford out of it—he realised that he must throw overboard at least twenty or thirty good subjects relating to Oxford—but at last he decided to write an impression of the Thames as seen from his attic window. It would have been difficult, of course, to have pitched upon a less suitable subject for "Rosemary," but Andrew made the usual mistake of the inexperienced journalist. He fancied that, because the Thames interested him, because it lent itself to a word-picture, because it enabled him to indulge in all sorts of picturesque and sentimental imaginings, that it would also interest the readers of "Rosemary."

He finished the article by ten o'clock, posted it, and called at the hotel to see if there were any letters for

him. There were none. Obviously, therefore, Mr. Keep was giving serious consideration to the article that Andrew had sent him on the previous day. Perhaps he had made up his mind to accept it—perhaps there would be a proof for him in the morning. If he received two guineas for the article, and could write one every day, that would be fourteen guineas a week. Fourteen guineas a week would amount to considerably more than seven hundred pounds a year. Sylvia had mentioned five hundred as the sum on which they could get married; on seven hundred they would be able to live in lavish style. If he could write two articles a day, at the same rate of payment, that would mean fourteen hundred a year. Fourteen hundred a year! That would be a magnificent income!

Exhilarated by these feats in mental arithmetic, he turned into Gatti's, and ordered a steak and fried potatoes, and a bottle of beer. There is quite enough nourishment in a steak to keep a young man going between ten-thirty at night and breakfast-time the next morning, but the waiter tempted him with a list of sweets, and Andrew could not resist some apple tart and cream. This led, by mere force of habit, to cheese and biscuits; a cup of coffee was the most natural thing in the world, and he thought he might as well have a small cigar with his coffee. The bill came to three-and-six, and he gave the waiter the odd sixpence. After all, that was much cheaper than dining at the hotel, and what was four shillings out of the two guineas that he had (probably) earned that evening? He strolled home in a very complacent frame of mind, and felt very grand indeed as he

slipped his latchkey into the door and let himself into the shabby little hall, strewn with yellow envelopes.

Mrs. Doubikin, hearing him come in, called from the basement to know at what hour he would like his breakfast.

"You can 'ave it at any time between eight and ten," she informed him, "but we can't serve no breakfusses after ten."

Andrew thought that nine o'clock would do very nicely, and climbed the stairs to his attic, where he remained for a long time at the window, looking out at the river, and thinking of Sylvia, and the glorious life that was in front of them.

He had not been very long in bed when loud voices from the street below startled him out of his first sleep. Jumping up hastily, he ran to the window and looked down. A man was leaning against the railings of the opposite house, and a woman was hitting him about the face and body with her clenched fist. Every time she struck him the woman shouted, in a high voice thickened with drink, some stimulating phrase. The man made a feeble resistance to the blows, but was apparently more concerned in keeping himself in an upright attitude by clinging to the railings. Andrew expected to see a large crowd collect, and was quite sure that both the man and the woman would presently be arrested and taken off to the police station. But nothing of the sort happened. A few loafers followed the progress of the affair at a safe distance, occasionally directing some jeering comment at the woman, the man being too far gone to appreciate their humour. When the woman had tired herself out, she suddenly seized the man by the arm,

and dragged him away with her round the corner. Silence fell upon the street, save for the amorous tones of the cats of the neighbourhood, who were evidently holding a soirée of exceptional importance. Andrew soon became used to such sounds of the night.

On awaking next morning, he looked round for the bell, with the intention of asking Jane to direct him to the bathroom. But there was no bell visible. He opened the door, and advanced to the stairhead. Jane presently appeared on the landing below, a pail in one hand and a wet cloth in the other.

"Jane!" called Andrew.

Jane looked up.

"Could you tell me where the bathroom is?"

Jane grinned. "There ain't none," she said.

"No bathroom?" repeated Andrew.

"Not all the time as *I've* bin 'ere."

Andrew returned to his room, and closed the door. This was quite an unexpected shock. Never before in his life had he been in a house without a bathroom. He began to perceive that hotels had their advantages. He must buy a bath that very day. It would be like his rooms at Oxford all over again. Somehow or other, though he should have been depressed by that thought, it cheered him up, and he put on one of his Oxford ties in order to stimulate the feeling. Then he ran downstairs, humming a gay tune, and entered the general breakfast-room.

Most of the boarders had had breakfast and gone about their business, but there were still three at the table. One of these was the huge man he had seen opening the telegrams. He had not yet begun his breakfast, but sat at the table in front of an enormous

pile of unopened letters. It was quite the largest pile of letters that Andrew had ever seen. The huge man opened them very slowly, threw the envelopes on the floor, and laid the letters themselves in an untidy pile to the left of him. Some of the letters, Andrew noticed with surprise, contained photographs, and every now and then the huge man would pause for a moment and look with indifference at one of the photographs.

The other two breakfasters were a red-haired youth, in a very high collar turned over at the corners, which were none too clean, and a very pale-faced man, about forty-five years of age, in a shabby suit. Nobody spoke; nothing was heard save the guzzling of the red-haired youth as he swallowed his coffee, the mastications of the man in the shabby suit as he chewed his bacon, and the sighs of the huge man as he opened his mysterious pile of letters. Presently the red-haired youth and the man in the shabby suit left the table, and Andrew was left alone with the huge man.

Mrs. Doubikin now came in, clad in a dirty print dress, and an even dirtier coarse apron.

"Good morning, Mr. Crichton," she panted. "'Ow long d'yer s'pose Mr. Foottit'll be afore 'e's ready fer 'is breakfus?"

"Mr. Foottit," replied Mr. Crichton, with ponderous formality and exactitude, "will present himself at this festal board within the space of five minutes, Mrs. Doubikin."

"Ho! Then I'll go and serve up yer breakfusses. You and Mr. Foottit won't mind this young gentleman 'aving 'is at the same time, I dessay?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Crichton, and then added, as he slowly opened yet another envelope, after bow-

ing in a very dignified way indeed to Andrew, "Not in the very least."

Mrs. Doubikin descended to the kitchen in a series of short bumps, and Andrew waited expectantly for Mr. Foottit. That gentleman proved to be the very antithesis of Mr. Crichton. He was a short person, cherubic in appearance, and as gay in his manner as a little bird upon a twig. He bowed low to Andrew, who, unaccustomed to such ceremony, rose from his seat, flushed, and endeavoured to return the salute in a becoming manner. Then Mr. Foottit waved a coloured handkerchief at Mr. Crichton with his right hand, described a semicircle in the air with his left hand, seated himself very briskly at the table, crossed one of his little legs over the other, and burst into song.

"Damn it," muttered Mr. Crichton, "don't do that!"

"Nerves?" cried Mr. Foottit. "Nerves, Theophilus? What right have you to nerves? What right have any of us to nerves, if it comes to that? Have I nerves? Yes, but they are my servants, not my masters. I revel in noise of all kinds! The shriek of a railway-engine, the toot-toot of a motor-horn, the sudden yell of the newsboy, the clanging bell of a fire-engine, even the crash of the plates when our beloved Jane places them before us—I batten upon these things! Nerves, forsooth? I'm surprised at you! I repeat, sir, that you have no right whatever to nerves at your time of life, and neither has anybody else!"

"If you had let me go to bed instead of sitting up till half-past two drinking your beastly whisky—!" grumbled Mr. Crichton.

"My dear fellow, how can you say that? You

know very well that you sat up of your own accord. Then why blame me? Can I help it if my conversation is so fascinating that you cannot tear yourself away until half-past two in the morning? I call that the basest ingratitude! What do you say, sir?" he added, suddenly turning to Andrew.

"Yes," said Andrew.

"What?" growled Mr. Crichton, also rounding upon Andrew.

"Of course," Andrew explained, "I don't know the circumstances of the case. I merely——"

"Then you shouldn't give an opinion," muttered Mr. Crichton.

"Churlish, Theophilus?" chimed in Mr. Foottit, perking his head to one side upon his little shoulders. "Churlish? And to the stranger within our gates? Oh, fie! I repeat, Theophilus, fie! Allow me to congratulate you, sir," he said to Andrew, "upon not hesitating to give an opinion although you did not know the circumstances of the case. Many people, indeed, most people, go through their lives without expressing any opinions whatsoever, merely because they do not know any circumstances of any cases whatsoever. Dumb! Lifetimes of dumbness! That's what happens to the swinish herd! May I ask, sir, whether you happen to be connected with the literary profession?"

"Yes," said Andrew, "I am slightly connected with it."

Mr. Crichton looked sharply at Andrew; then he looked at Mr. Foottit; then he turned, with a deep sigh, to the business of opening envelopes.

"Slightly! He says that he is 'slightly' connected

with the literary profession!" Mr. Foottit raised his face and hands towards the ceiling with an expression of horror. "My dear sir," he went on, suddenly bringing them down again, "never say that you are slightly connected with anything, least of all the noble, the glorious, the stupendous, the amazing profession of letters! You are either steeped to your neck in it, you are either bathing in it, you are either wallowing in it, you are either almost drowning in it, or you are not in it at all! Slightly, forsooth! But tell me, my good sir, am I addressing a poet, a dramatist, a novelist, a leader writer, or a mere Editor such as myself?"

An Editor! Andrew's heart began to thump very violently. Was he actually living under the same roof as an Editor? Was he actually to take his breakfast at the same table as an Editor? What an extraordinary slice of good-fortune had brought him to this obscure house in Buckingham Street! Surely the fairies must have been leading him by the hand when he knocked at Mrs. Doubikin's door! A fig for Messrs. Quain, Keep, and Campbell! He would use them, if it suited his purpose to do so, but Mr. Foottit was evidently the star to which he must hitch his wagon. Mr. Foottit had been delivered into his hands. As for Mr. Crichton, if he was the present sub-editor, as he appeared to be, so much the worse for him. He should be kept on at a nominal salary, but Andrew himself would be dealing with that mass of correspondence before many days were over.

"Just at present," he replied, "I am what is called a free-lance, but I have had experience in all kinds of journalism."

Mr. Foottit turned to Mr. Crichton. "You hear that, Theophilus? This gentleman has had experience in all kinds of journalism. A mere youth in appearance—if he will pardon my saying so—he has yet had experience in all kinds of journalism. Marvellous!" He returned to Andrew. "Might I ask, my dear sir, to the staffs of which papers in London or the provinces you have been attached?"

"Well," Andrew was forced to admit, "I haven't actually been on the staff of any paper as yet. That is just what I should like. When I said that I had had experience in all kinds of journalism, I meant that I had written many different kinds of articles, and that they had been printed in various papers."

Mr. Foottit suddenly became very solemn, folded his hands upon the table, and looked steadily at Andrew for nearly two minutes—which is quite a long time for anybody to look steadily at anybody.

"Let me," he said, "offer you the advice of a very much older man. No, I am not going to dissuade you from entering the glorious profession of journalism in real earnest. I can see that you anticipate a wet blanket, but I am going to offer you instead a warm rug. Yes, a very warm and particularly cosy rug—the sort of rug upon which a man could very well make his bed until a better one was provided for him. The lot of the outside contributor, my dear sir, is a very harassing, a very precarious lot. The work is hard, the anxiety is intense, the disappointments are unending, and the rewards are few and far between. I have been a free-lance journalist myself in my time, and I know. Contrast the position of the man on an editorial staff. He is a King! An Emperor! An

Autocrat! A Ruler! A Despot! The reputations, the fortunes, even the lives of others are in his hands. I solemnly assure you, my dear sir, that I would rather be the Editor of a journal with a sufficiently large circulation to command attention than His Most Gracious Majesty himself."

"So would I," agreed Andrew. "I should be very much obliged if you could tell me how to begin."

"The proper way to begin," said Mr. Foottit, "is to apply in the right quarter."

"Yes, but which is the right quarter?"

"I," said Mr. Foottit, rising from his chair, and bowing to Andrew, "am the right quarter."

Then he sat down again, and applied himself heartily to the poached eggs and fried bacon which had been clashed down in front of him by the cheerful Jane.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE WOLVES GOBBLE UP THE LITTLE LAMB

ANDREW, for his part, was so excited by the turn of events that he could scarcely do justice to Mrs. Doubikin's cooking, though that lady had continued to do her duty by Mr. Doubikin in providing for her new lodger the smallest possible amount of food for his shilling. What sort of paper could it possibly be that Mr. Foottit edited? What was the explanation of all the telegrams in the hall, and the photographs lying by the side of Mr. Crichton, and Mr. Crichton himself? Where were the offices? What was the size of Mr. Foottit's staff? If it was a prosperous paper, why was he living in this obscure and dingy lodging-house? And, most important of all, what did Mr. Foottit mean by saying, without knowing anything whatever of Andrew's possibilities, that he, Mr. Foottit, was the right quarter to which Andrew should apply?

For answers to all these questions he had to wait until the two great men had finished breakfast. Then they both rose, and paused for a moment whilst Mr. Foottit offered a silent benediction. Mr. Crichton now left the room with his huge bundle of correspondence, and Andrew heard him slowly climbing the stairs to the room on the first floor. As soon as the huge man might be supposed to be out of hearing, Mr. Foottit jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"A very fine fellow, my friend Theophilus Crichton! A man in a thousand! You must get to know him better, and then you will appreciate him almost as much as I do myself. It is impossible that you should appreciate him to the full because it takes years to plumb the depths of Crichton's goodness, amiability, noble-heartedness, staunchness, and loyalty. You must not judge men by their exterior, my dear sir. . . . By the way, might I presume to ask your name?"

"My name is Andrew Dick."

"Any relation to my friend of the same name at the Admiralty?"

"I have no relation at the Admiralty. As a matter of fact, I have no relations at all."

Mr. Foottit's expression softened. He advanced to Andrew, and held out a very small, very plump, and very soft hand.

"No relations? That is sad, but you must not say that you have no friends. I am a man of very swift judgment, Mr. Dick, and I have taken a great fancy to you. In point of fact, I took a great fancy to you the very moment I entered the room this morning. I saw at a glance that you were one of the right sort—one of our sort. I felt instinctively that you followed the profession of letters, and I was also inclined to tell myself that you had been educated at one of our great universities."

Andrew paled. Was this splendid chance to be snatched from him just as it seemed to be within his grasp?

"I do happen to be an Oxford man," he confessed, with a note of pathetic entreaty in his voice, "but I

want you to overlook that, Mr. Foottit. I can at least boast that I did not take my degree."

"Splendid!" cried Mr. Foottit. "Magnificent! There spake a noble mind! It is remarkable to me, Mr. Dick, that you, at your tender age, should have already grasped the fact that to pass through the University without taking a degree is the sign of a free and soaring mind! I only wish that I could say the same of myself. I am one of those unfortunate beings to whom were thrown all the prizes of scholarship. Long before I had reached the age of one-and-twenty, I found that there were few fields in the realms of learning left for me to traverse. What was the result? Instead of setting out upon my career with a mind untrammelled by the thoughts and philosophies of others, my brain was clogged, literally waterlogged, with the musings of Aristotle, the heroics of Homer, the melodies of Virgil, the sophistries of Plato, the amblings of Thucydides, and the inanities of Xenophon. I had no personality of my own left. What did I do? I determined to throw overboard all this knowledge that I had acquired with so much labour, but the work was hard, and the way was steep. Now, at last, you see me as I am—a man of intellect, perhaps, but a man of learning and scholarship no longer. In short, the Managing Director and Editor of 'The Straight Tip.'"

Andrew looked rather blank.

"Maybe," continued Mr. Foottit airily, "you have not yet heard of 'The Straight Tip.' That would not surprise me, seeing that the journal has been in existence for a mere three weeks. In point of fact, our third number was issued yesterday. Will you take a

cigarette? Our good Mrs. Doubikin permits us to smoke in this room after breakfast."

Andrew took a cigarette, Mr. Foottit did the same, and they seated themselves in the rickety easy-chairs on either side of the empty grate.

"'The Straight Tip,'" explained Mr. Foottit, "is unique among the journals of this country. It appeals to two enormous portions of the population; in point of fact, it would be more correct to state that it appeals to the whole population divided into two portions. Have you ever asked yourself, Mr. Dick, what are the ruling passions of this country—or, for the matter of that, every country in the world? I will tell you. Chance and Religion. You will seldom find these ruling passions in the same person, but you will find them, nine times out of ten, in the same house. For example, the master of the house likes to have his shilling on a horserace, whilst the mistress of the house loves nothing better than to go to church or chapel. Very well. In my paper, 'The Straight Tip,' I appeal both to the man, who is swayed by the legitimate desire to turn his honest shilling into an honest sovereign, and also to his wife, who is swayed by the very praiseworthy desire to ensure a place for herself in the next world, whilst being quite willing to make the very best of this one. In short, my paper is a religious-sporting paper. Is that unique, or is it not?"

"It must be unique," replied Andrew, warming to the idea.

"And it is," said Mr. Foottit, thumping a soft little palm with a soft little fist. "It is unique! Nobody has ever thought of such a thing before, and the consequence will be that I, and those concerned with me

in this enterprise, will make a huge fortune out of it."

"Then that explains all those telegrams I saw in the hall?"

"Exactly. My friend, Theophilus Crichton—a most praiseworthy man!—takes charge of that department. He is, so to speak, my Sporting Editor. We have a system whereby our readers can intimate to us the particular horse in which they are interested for any particular race, and the extent of their interest in this horse. We are not bookmakers, you must understand; nothing of that sort, Mr. Dick; but we are willing to help our readers by indicating to others the names of the horses which they have indicated to us.

"The religious side of the paper I take charge of myself. It is one of my pleasant tasks to show that religious convictions and sporting tendencies may go hand in hand. I write a leader to that effect in each number, and by this means I feel that I am doing a good work by reconciling the wives of this country to the harmless, and sometimes lucrative, hobbies of their husbands.

"Now I think I have said enough to give you a vague idea of the labours that engage myself and that splendid fellow, Theophilus Crichton. Come and see the office."

He sprang out of his chair and walked rapidly from the room, followed no less rapidly by Andrew. Mr. Foottit took the stairs at a surprising speed, so that the two arrived on the first floor landing almost like a flash of lightning. Mr. Foottit threw open the door, bowed low, and Andrew passed into the editorial

sanctum of "The Straight Tip." It was a surprisingly large room, being, indeed, the main room of the house. It looked into the street, and was lighted by two large windows of an old-fashioned pattern. In the centre of the room stood a huge table, smothered with letters, proofs, scribbling paper, pens, envelopes, and newspaper cuttings. At the far end of the room was a very much smaller table, which supported a very small typewriting-machine; seated in front of this table, laboriously tapping out a letter with two fingers, was Mr. Crichton. For the rest, there were two very old arm-chairs, a few sporting reference-books, a Bible, a dictionary, a much-thumbed volume of sermons, a bottle of whisky, a jug of water, two glasses, a Churchman's Almanack, a portrait of the latest Derby winner cut from an illustrated paper, and, most important of all in Andrew's eyes, the editorial chair.

"Here we are!" cried Mr. Foottit, rubbing his hands as he seated himself in the post of honour. "Here, Mr. Dick, is the greatest room in the world! From this room is issued the journal which will eventually sway the hearts and minds of every man and woman in this kingdom. At the present moment it is not swaying quite so many as we could wish, because the rascally book-stalls and newsagents have not taken up our journal, so that we have to rely upon the halfpenny post, but we shall live down this wicked opposition! We shall break through this domineering ring! We shall succeed by virtue of our enthusiasm, our genius, and our industry! Allow me to present you with a copy of the last issue."

He handed to Andrew a small journal, containing, in all, some sixteen or twenty pages. It was described,

beneath the title, as "A Weekly Journal for the Soulful and the Sporting." Side by side, on the front page, were the portraits of an eminent jockey and an eminent divine; Mr. Foottit was nothing if not thorough in his methods. On the second page was Mr. Foottit's leader for the week, entitled "All the Winners," whilst beneath this ran the quotation, "They who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize." Facing this, on the third page, were Mr. Theophilus Crichton's selections for the next flat race, rounded off, by way of what is known in journalese as a tail-piece, by a pen-and-ink sketch of St. Paul's Cathedral by night.

But the most surprising feature to Andrew of this surprising paper was the photographic illustrations. Save for the portraits of the jockey and the bishop on the first page, the paper did not contain the photograph of any person of whom he had ever heard. And yet it was peppered throughout with portraits. There were middle-aged ladies in hats, and old ladies in bonnets, and young ladies with bare heads, and babies with bare toes; there were middle-aged men in top-hats, and young men in bowlers, and youths in caps. There were one or two servant-girls, and one gentleman who might very well have swept a crossing without attracting undue attention.

Mr. Foottit, noticing the puzzled expression on Andrew's face, rubbed his soft little hands with glee.

"You are looking at our illustrations," he said, "and you are wondering why you have never heard of all those celebrities. I will tell you, Mr. Dick, why you have never heard of them; they were not celebrities at all until I made them so by publishing their por-

traits. And why have I published their portraits? Well, why not? Why should I be content to follow on the hackneyed lines laid down by other journals? Why should I present, week after week, the well-known features of actresses and actors, politicians and society dames, of whom we are all so weary?

"That is one of my great ideas, Mr. Dick. In their various localities, these good people are just as well-known, and are of far greater interest than the prominent personages of the so-called great world. The appearance of their portraits in my paper is bound to make my paper famous in the district to which these worthy people belong. It will be passed from hand to hand, from door to door, from street to street. Extra copies will be ordered. The particular portrait of interest will be cut out, framed in cork, and hung upon the wall. I may also tell you, as a professional secret, that there is a small fee attaching to the publication of these portraits—not a large fee—just a mere half-crown or so to cover the expense of making the block. Now, Mr. Dick, do I win your confidence, or do I not?"

"You certainly do," said Andrew.

"Ha ha! You hear that, Theophilus? I have won Mr. Dick's confidence! That is what I call a fine morning's work! And you are prepared to join my staff, Mr. Dick? You are prepared to assist my friend Theophilus Crichton and myself in our arduous but entrancing labours?"

"I shall be delighted," said Andrew, wondering when Mr. Foottit would touch upon the question of salary.

"I know what is passing in your mind," cried the

little Editor. "You are wondering how you can prove to me that I shall find in you a loyal colleague. You are wondering why I should be prepared to run the risks of letting you into our secrets. I will tell you why, Mr. Dick. I am going to do this because, in the first place, I took a very great fancy to you from the outset; I am going to do it, in the second place, because you, in your turn, are going to become bound to us more surely than any legal document could bind."

"Am I?" said Andrew, surprised.

"You are. You are going to become one of the Founders of this great journal. You are going to participate in the gigantic profits that will presently accrue from the publication of 'The Straight Tip.' In point of fact, you are going to take up a few Founders' shares—merely, of course, by way of proving that confidence in myself that you have so generously expressed in words."

Andrew felt rather alarmed. Mr. Foottit had evidently mistaken him for a man of means. Just how many Founders' shares he would be expected to buy he could not guess, but the smallest quantity would probably be one hundred, and his capital, as we know, was reduced to thirteen pounds. An explanation would be very awkward. Mr. Foottit would probably be annoyed; Mr. Crichton would certainly be annoyed; the offer of a post on the staff would be withdrawn. All this would not matter so much were it not that he had to meet them both every morning at breakfast. He did not wish to make enemies at the very outset of his career as a London journalist. He might, of course, offer to pay for the shares in labour,

but how would he live in the meantime? These thoughts flashed through his young head in a moment, and Mr. Foottit replied to them just as though he had uttered them aloud.

"Pray don't distress yourself, Mr. Dick. Mr. Crichton and myself are not seeking financial support for our venture; we are not the men to embark upon an enterprise of this kind until we can see our way clear in that respect. Oh, dear, no! My sole reason for asking you to take up a few Founders' shares is that you may have an interest in the sale of the paper quite apart from your salary."

Andrew drew a deep breath of relief. So there *was* to be a salary. That was good.

"What I should suggest," continued Mr. Foottit, with the air of one bestowing an enormous favour, "is that we assign to you, say, one hundred Founders' shares at the present quotation of two shillings apiece. These shares will remain your property for all time—unless you choose to sell them when they acquire a phenomenal value. By the way, Theophilus, we can spare Mr. Dick one hundred Founders' shares, I trust?"

Mr. Crichton rose from his seat, crossed the room, opened a cupboard, and took out of it something that looked like a washing-book. This he consulted with the utmost care for several minutes; he then replaced it on the shelf, closed the door of the cupboard, and said, as he returned slowly to his little typewriting-machine, "Yes, sir, we have just that number of shares to dispose of."

"That is good," cried Mr. Foottit. "Then shall we call it a deal, Mr. Dick? Am I to direct my friend

Theophilus to hand you the necessary piece of parchment, in return for which you will hand me the small sum of ten pounds?"

"There is just one point I should like settled," said Andrew.

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Dick. Pray name it."

"I should like to know what salary you will be able to pay me for working on your paper. I do not, of course, expect a large salary, being inexperienced in editorial work, but I am quite dependent for my living on what I earn, and so you see——"

"Precisely, precisely. Just one moment." Mr. Foottit crossed to his partner, and they conversed earnestly in low tones for a minute or two. Then Mr. Foottit returned to his editorial chair, his face aglow with benevolence.

"My friend Theophilus Crichton and myself," he announced, "will be delighted to offer you the position of Assistant-Editor of 'The Straight Tip,' which will carry with it, to commence with, the salary of two guineas a week. It is understood, of course, that you take up the Founders' shares at the price I have mentioned at once. In five weeks, therefore, you will have more than repaid yourself, you will have a substantial holding in this valuable property, you will have gained invaluable experience, and your salary will still be continued, and, I hope, even increased."

"Thank you very much," replied Andrew, already drafting in his mind an enthusiastic letter to Sylvia. "Excuse my mentioning it, but would it do if I took no salary for the first five weeks, and paid for my shares in that way?"

Mr. Foottit stared at him in blank astonishment.

"My good sir, don't you know that what you are proposing directly contravenes the laws of this country? Have you never heard of the stringent laws which govern the formation of a Limited Liability Company? With all the will in the world to oblige you, my friend Theophilus Crichton and myself could not possibly run the risk of coming into conflict with the Law. I am sure, now that I have made the matter plain to you, that you will be the first—!"

Andrew flushed. "I am exceedingly sorry. I didn't know that I was proposing anything illegal. Please overlook it. If you will allow me, I will pay for the shares at once."

Mr. Foottit bowed graciously, and Andrew ran upstairs to his attic, unlocked his suit-case, took out two five-pound-notes, and hastened downstairs again to the Editorial room of "The Straight Tip." He handed the notes to Mr. Foottit, who tucked them into his waistcoat pocket. Then he presented Andrew with a piece of paper upon which these words had been typed beneath the title of the paper:

"Know All, by These Presents, that Mr. Andrew Dick, Being a Subject of His Majesty the King of England, Hereby Becomes the Sole Possessor of One Hundred Founders' Shares in the Registered Copyright Journal Known as 'The Straight Tip.' Signed—

LEVITICUS FOOTTIT.
THEOPHILUS CRICHTON."

"And so that little matter is settled," said Mr. Foottit. "You will kindly commence your duties, Mr. Dick, by taking sole charge of the office whilst my friend Theophilus Crichton and myself attend to a

matter of urgent importance in the immediate vicinity. Should enquiries be made for us during our absence, you will kindly say that we have every expectation of returning to the office within half-an-hour. Pray seat yourself in the editorial chair, Mr. Dick, and write me a leader for the next issue of the paper on the lines that I have indicated. For the present, we wish you good luck and good morning."

There were two hats upon two pegs near the door. One was a clerical wideawake, and the other a white topper of the kind usually affected by bookmakers. Mr. Foottit put on the wideawake, and Mr. Crichton donned the white topper. Then, having linked arms, they bowed in a dignified manner to the new Assistant-Editor, opened the door, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

ANDREW, UNDER STRESS OF CIRCUMSTANCES, TAKES A HIDEOUS RESOLVE

ANDREW remained in sole charge of the office until four o'clock in the afternoon. Being a healthy youth, and one accustomed to ample meals at regular times, he became so hungry by that time that he felt compelled to slip out for a snack. He had written his leader, keeping as close as possible to the model formulated by Mr. Foottit. He was very much surprised when he found that the Editor and the Sporting-Editor did not return as soon as they had intended, but concluded that the business had proved to be of a particularly complicated nature.

Among the letters and telegrams lying on the table in the hall he found an envelope addressed to himself in his own handwriting. As he guessed, directly he set eyes on it, it contained the article which he had sent to "Rosemary," together with the usual printed regrets. What did that matter now? He was part-owner of a weekly paper himself; he was also Assistant-Editor of that paper. A little luck, a little perseverance, and he would soon be as great a man himself as Mr. Socrates Quain.

After bolting a hasty meal at the nearest restaurant, he returned to the office, but the room was still empty. At six o'clock he decided that his duties were over for the day, and retired to his attic to write to Sylvia.

"I have a most surprising piece of news for you! I have actually become the Assistant-Editor of a weekly paper, and my salary, to begin with, is to be two guineas a week. What do you think of that? I don't suppose you have ever heard of the paper, because it has only just started, but the idea is a rattling good one. I will send you a copy to-morrow, and of course you shall have one regularly every week. I am going to work like mad now that I have got this splendid chance. It will be my own fault if I do not succeed and go right to the top.

"The Editor of the paper is an awfully quaint little chap called Foottit. I am sure you would like him, and he would amuse you tremendously. He has a partner, rather a taciturn sort of fellow named Theophilus Crichton. He is the Sporting-Editor. It is all very different from what I had imagined London journalism to be, rather less exciting in a way, but of course the experience will be invaluable.

"The above will be my address for some little time to come. I have got very pleasant rooms at the top of the house, with a view of the Thames. This is in the heart of London, and simply teems with real London life and types. Some day, when I am rich and famous, I shall bring you down this street and show you the house. Now, as I have been hard at it in the office all day long, I am going for a walk by the river to get some exercise and fresh air.

"All my love."

Andrew again dined well, for, although his capital was now reduced to three pounds, and he would have to meet Mrs. Doubikin's bill at the end of the week,

he could look forward to a regular salary as Assistant-Editor of "The Straight Tip." As he turned the corner from John Street into Buckingham Street, a sound of merriment fell upon his ear. At any rate, it was the sort of noise that we associate with merriment in this country—two voices, hopelessly out of tune both with themselves and each other, loudly raised in song. Roughly defined, one might have been called a tenor and the other a bass.

Andrew was rather horrified to discover that the uproar was proceeding from the first floor of his own house. He was quite accustomed to this sort of thing at Oxford, but he had scarcely expected two literary men, more or less advanced in years, to confuse pleasure with business by holding a "rag" in their own editorial sanctum. Besides, as is the way with youth, he was rather shocked at the idea of middle-aged responsible men indulging in the levities of their juniors. The thing came upon him as a blow. Instinctively he felt less certain of receiving his salary than when the appointment was made that morning.

There was a letter from Sylvia waiting for him in the hall-passage, sent on from the hotel. He slipped it quickly into his pocket, feeling as though there was some desecration to her in allowing her letter to enter this shabby and rather queer house. On his way upstairs, he met the cheerful Jane.

"They've come back," said Jane, with a giggle.

"So I hear," replied Andrew.

"Must 'ave got a bit o' brass orf someone," continued Jane.

"Very likely," replied Andrew, with a sinking sensation at the heart.

Jane peeped over the banisters, and then drew a little nearer to him with a mysterious look on her grubby face.

"Don't you 'ave too much ter do with that lot," she whispered.

"What's the matter with them?" asked Andrew, feeling that he had been brought desperately low already when it came to conspiring with a lodging-house slavey.

"Matter with 'em? What d'yer think?"

"I don't know. Mr. Foottit seems a very nice little man."

"Nice?" Jane allowed herself a gesture which conveyed the most supreme contempt. "Nice? Yes, 'e's nice enough. Bit too nice, I should think. Bit too much soft soap fer my taste. As fer the other, I'll tell yer what 'e is—'e's a 'og."

"You ought not to say those things unless you know anything against them," observed Andrew.

"Oughtn't I? Orl right. Do as yer like, on'y don't fergit as I warned yer."

Andrew passed on to his room. He closed the door and the window, but he could not quite shut out these sounds of revelry. They formed a queer accompaniment to Sylvia's letter.

"I was so awfully delighted," she wrote, "to hear that you began so splendidly. I always knew that you had it in you to make a great success, and I am awfully proud of you already. It was so brave of you to plunge into that great London without knowing anybody, and even braver to have bearded those formidable Editors in their lairs. I should have loved to see you talking to them! I can quite imagine how you

looked and what you said, and I am not a bit surprised to hear that they all want you to write for them.

"Yes, I think it is quite wise of you to move out of the hotel into rooms. You know you are rather inclined to be extravagant, but what is the good of earning a lot of money if you spend it all as fast as you get it? You will never be any better off if you always do that. Forgive this little lecture, but of course I feel a good deal of responsibility for you. Mind you get very nice rooms, nicely furnished, and clean, with nice people to look after you, and be very sure that the cooking is good, and that your bed is well aired. There's domesticity for you! I only wish I could come up and help you to find some rooms, but of course that is out of the question.

"I wonder if you miss me very much, or whether you are already beginning to forget? I expect to hear in every letter that you have met some beautiful and entrancing creature, brilliantly clever and up-to-date, who has simply made one bite at you and snapped you up. I know that will happen, and you mustn't think of me in the least if it does. The important thing is for you to get on and be very happy, but you won't forget our compact, will you? Just send me a tiny little line to say it is all over, so that I may bestow my royal hand and fortune on some other lucky person. I don't quite see where he is to come from—though I have heard that there is a new curate at Eastwood, which is only seven miles away after all! I must bike over and have a look at him in order to be prepared for eventualities.

"Goodbye, dear old boy. Keep your pecker up, and you will soon have London at your feet.

"As much love as you deserve."

Andrew was the sole representative of the staff of "The Straight Tip" at breakfast the next morning. There was the usual pile of letters waiting for Mr. Crichton, but the Assistant-Editor did not touch them. Ascending to the office after breakfast, he found the room reeking of stale cigar smoke and the dregs of whisky. There was a broken glass on the floor, cigar ash all over the table, and two whisky bottles, both quite empty, on the sideboard. What hurt him most, however, was the state of his own brilliant leader, which he had left for Mr. Foottit to look through. The first two pages had been folded into a spill, and were half burnt; the other pages were soaked through and through with whisky-and-water.

He was setting to work on a fresh copy when the door opened very quietly, and Mr. Foottit himself entered. He was dressed in pyjamas, carpet slippers, and a very greasy old dressing-gown. His hair was on end, his face pale, his eyes puffy, his chin unshaven, and his hands inclined to tremble. On seeing Andrew, he stared at him in surprise for a moment, and then, with an effort, pulled himself together.

"Ah, my young friend from Oxford! Good morning, my young friend from Oxford. Already hard at work, I see. That's the way! Nothing like it! Nothing like work! I have been a worker all my life, and now see where I am."

He shuffled across to the sideboard, and picked up

the first whisky bottle, holding it on a level with his eyes between himself and the window.

"Empty? That's a most extraordinary thing! I wonder who's had that? You don't happen to know, my young friend from Oxford, if Theophilus had any guests in here last night, do you?"

"I rather fancy he had," said Andrew. "At least, I heard sounds of festivity."

"Oh, you did, did you? The splendid Theophilus had a party, eh? The sly old dog! Why didn't he ask us, eh, my young friend from Oxford? We ought to have been in that—don't you think so? The sly old dog!"

He shuffled back to the sideboard, replaced the first bottle, and took up the second. This he also held to the light, and with the same result.

"Empty?" he ejaculated again, genuinely surprised. "Both empty? Oh, Theophilus, my Theophilus, you are treading the roseate path that leads to destruction! Always beware, my young friend from Oxford, of the roseate path that leads to destruction! I have seen many men go down that path—young men, gallant fellows, brilliant intellects, handsome, brave, dashing—and what returns? I will tell you, my young friend from Oxford, what returns—at least, I will tell you later."

And with that, he turned abruptly, lurched out of the room, stumbled across the passage into his bedroom, slammed the door, and Andrew saw nothing more of him until very much later in the day.

In the meantime, having the office to himself, he had plenty of time for contemplation.

It was quite clear that Mr. Foottit and Mr. Crichton

had contrived to do him out of ten pounds. It was also clear, in view of the overnight proceedings, that he had made a serious mistake in getting mixed up with them. But Mr. Foottit had spoken only too truthfully when he said that Andrew was going to become bound to them more surely than any legal document could bind. His only chance of retrieving his capital, or any portion of it, lay in remaining Assistant-Editor of "The Straight Tip." Surely Mr. Foottit could not go back upon his word to pay him a salary of two guineas a week? If he did, the little Editor would find that he had to deal with a desperate man, and he would have the pleasure of meeting that desperate man at all hours of the day—even, if necessary, of the night.

But what a sorry beginning the whole thing was to his career as a professional journalist! What a blow to his pride! In this moment of pardonable despondency, he looked back over the years that he had lived, and he found nothing of which to be particularly proud. He had never excelled at any of the usual things. At school he had distinguished himself mainly as an adroit shirker of work, a weaver of thrilling romances for consumption in the dormitory after the lights were out and talking was forbidden, a good light comedian in the school theatricals, a trick-cyclist, a fairly good swimmer, and a fairly successful miler. He had taken prizes, but more by virtue of his readiness with the pen than by knowledge steadily acquired from books. At cricket, despite all his efforts, he had been utterly useless, and at football he had never succeeded in getting his colours. On the whole, therefore, such success as had come to him had been a

success of personality rather than of solid achievement.

His career at Oxford had followed on lines very similar. He had taken the earlier examinations without much difficulty, and had then settled down to a thorough enjoyment of an ideally idle life. Every now and then he had written something for one of the undergraduate journals, which had brought him transient fame; he had rowed in the Torpids, but had never succeeded in getting his place in the Eight; he had made one or two speeches at the Union, which had apparently pleased the House, but he had never scrambled after office; once he had written a topical encore verse for one of the comedians in a touring musical comedy playing at the theatre, and had had the satisfaction of hearing his lines sung and bawled all over the 'Varsity. This pretty well summed up his record up to the time of his coming to London. It was not, he told himself, ruefully, a career of which he could be particularly proud.

And now, as he sat in this sordid room awaiting the companionship of the cheerful ruffians who had constituted themselves his masters, he told himself that he had missed another opportunity. All his articles had been returned to him; all the Editors with whom he had been granted interviews had rejected his offers of services. He had not much more than fifty shillings between himself and starvation—that is to say, if Mr. Foottit failed to pay him his salary at the end of the week, and this was an eventuality for which he must be prepared. One avenue alone was now open to him, and that was an avenue from which he had turned, again and again, with loathing. As an

Oxford man, and as a person of presentable appearance, with a fair supply of good clothes, he knew that he could always obtain board and lodging, at any rate, as an assistant-master in a school. This was the easy and the obvious thing to do when one came down from Oxford and had to earn one's own living without any particular qualifications for doing it. Of course, the scholastic market was terribly overcrowded; nine men out of every ten coming down from the universities seem to drift into schools for a time because they are sure of a roof over their heads, food to eat, a fair supply of pocket-money, and a continuation of the kind of life to which they are accustomed, and the result of this overcrowding of the market is that the salaries, except for the exceptional men, who have either taken very good degrees, or have distinguished themselves in the athletic world, are proportionately low.

Besides, Andrew hated the whole idea of the thing. He did not want to teach little boys to recite "mensa" and keep their hands clean; he did not want to trot up and down a football field every afternoon of his life, simulating an enthusiasm which he did not feel in this Gulliver among the Lilliputians sort of business, in order to convince the headmaster who had employed him that he was earning his forty or fifty pounds a year and his "keep." The whole business was intensely repellent to him, and, quite apart from that, he knew, as all those young men who enter the scholastic profession without any particular love or adaptability for it know, that it led to nothing. For ten or fifteen years he could be sure of a bare living; after that he would be superannuated; his methods

would be out-of-date; he would be too stiff even to play Gulliver on the football field; his salary would gradually become smaller and smaller, and the schools in which he was employed would become cheaper and cheaper, until at last the day would arrive when he would fail to obtain employment even on "mutual terms."

Still, the situation had to be faced. He was very near the end of his tether. He could not expect Mrs. Doubikin to let him have unlimited credit whilst he established himself as a London journalist.

Andrew passed at least two hours in more serious thought than he had at one time expected ever to devote to anything. At the end of that time, he sought relief in action. Leaving a little note on the table for Mr. Foottit, he dashed up to his attic, put on his new hat and his new gloves, took his new stick, and hurried off to the offices of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co., the well-known scholastic agents of Regent Street.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE RESULT OF MEETING A MAN IN TOO-GOOD BOOTS

THE name of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co. trips readily from the lips of Oxford and Cambridge men today, just as it has tripped for the past twenty or thirty years. The important man of this firm is the great, the powerful, the feared, the almost omnipotent Plumbridge. Plumbridge, by placing his finger on an electric button, can waft a young man north, south, east, or west, give him his heart's desire, start him on the broad and easy road that leads, as a rule, nowhere. Plumbridge, it is very well known, has the headmasters of Great Britain in his pocket. If Plumbridge takes a fancy to you, you can have the pick of all the softest jobs; you can drop into one of those large and affluent schools where the assistant-masters have their own studies, where the work is light, where the games are good, where a man is treated as a gentleman. If Plumbridge takes a fancy to you, you may find yourself, when the term is over, on board a finely-appointed yacht bound for the Mediterranean or the North Sea; you may find yourself seated at dinner next to the charming daughter of your millionaire employer; you may presently find yourself as private secretary to your millionaire employer; and then it rests with you whether you do or do not be-

come the son-in-law of your millionaire employer. All these things Plumbridge can do, and is doing all the year round. That is why the name of Plumbridge is spoken with bated breath in many and many a college room, and that is why Andrew's knees shook a little as he pushed open the door of Messrs. Plumbridge and Slice's famous offices, and handed in his card at the window marked "Enquiries."

The clerk who received the card looked him over and appeared to approve. Every young man who enters these doors has to be approved. He is looked over from head to foot exactly like a competing ox at a cattle show. If he is of good height, well-dressed, square of shoulder, clear of eye, and unmistakably a gentleman, it is even possible that the clerk may be led into addressing him as "sir." If, on the other hand, he is squat, shabby, timorous, physically unattractive generally, he might as well spare himself the ignominy of a visit to Regent Street.

Andrew was of good appearance, well-dressed, and his still bronzed complexion gave him a spurious air of athleticism which impressed the clerk. Nothing goes down quite so well in the offices of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co. as an air of athleticism. Intellect is all very well in its way; breeding is better; but athleticism rules the roost. If you have secured your half-Blue for tennis, Mr. Plumbridge will throw you a cheerful nod and a half-smile; if you have secured your full Blue for running or jumping, or even for putting the weight, Mr. Plumbridge will shake you warmly by the hand; if you have secured your Blue for rowing, rugger, or soccer, Mr. Plumbridge will smile broadly, wring your hand, and place his left arm about

your shoulders; but if you have captained the 'Varsity team at Lords, or rowed for either university in the 'Varsity boat race, Mr. Plumbridge will throw himself on his knees before you, fling his capacious arms about your ankles, lay his forehead upon your dusty boots, and weep for sheer joy.

Andrew was told that Mr. Plumbridge would see him, but he must wait.

"About how long do you think?" asked Andrew.

"I couldn't say," replied the clerk.

"I have to be back at my office as soon as possible."

The clerk stared. It was not usual for the young gentlemen who came in at that door to talk about offices. Perhaps he had made a mistake—perhaps Mr. Andrew Dick was not the sort of person that Mr. Plumbridge wished to see. Perhaps—it was just possible—Mr. Andrew Dick was not a person out of whom Mr. Plumbridge would be likely to make any money! That was an awful thought! Then a happy idea occurred to the clerk. Retreating for a moment to his desk, he returned with a printed form, which he handed to Andrew.

"Just fill this in," he commanded.

Andrew looked at the paper. He found a series of questions of the most intimate and searching kind.

"Name of father." "Occupation of father." "Name of mother before marriage." "Have you ever had any disease? If so, state which, and at what dates." "What is the smallest salary you would accept?" "Are you a Churchman?" "Are you an abstainer?" "Do you smoke?" "Are you an athlete?" "Give athletic record." "Are you prepared to coach in cricket?" "Have you ever lived abroad? If so, state in what

countries and for what period." "Can you give references to any member of the aristocracy?" "Do you ride?" "Do you swim?" "Do you shoot?" "Do you dance?" "Do you sing?" "Do you draw?" "Have you any other accomplishments, such as playing any musical instrument?" "Are you experienced in amateur theatricals?" "Married or single?" "State height and weight." "When were you last vaccinated?" "Are you subject to colds, coughs, chills, influenza, or bronchitis?" "Is there any record of insanity in your family?" "Are you a politician? If so, state which side you favour." "Have you any doubts as to the authenticity of the Christian religion?" Together with the usual details as to name of school and college.

We have seen something of Andrew's facility in answering questions, and he answered all these with a fairly glib and unhesitating pen. The members of the aristocracy to whom he referred were not particularly dazzling, but he managed to drag a Lady Something out of the dim recesses of his early boyhood, and he skipped lightly over the fact that he had had chicken-pox, whooping-cough, influenza (slightly), and a good many colds in the head. He made the most of his somewhat meagre athletic record, wrote learnedly round the authenticity of the Christion religion, and patted himself very soundly on the back in the matter of amateur theatricals. He read it through, and, his usual optimism returning in full force, declared that the lowest salary he would be prepared to accept was one hundred pounds a year with full residence. Then he waited.

He waited for an hour, and still there came no sum-

mons to the presence of Mr. Plumbridge. He waited for an hour and a half, and Mr. Plumbridge remained invisible. At the end of two hours he learnt, on application to the suspicious clerk, that Mr. Plumbridge had gone out to lunch, and had not yet returned. Andrew throttled back his indignation, and darted off to the nearest A.B.C. shop, where he partook of a piece of lunch-cake and a glass of milk. He was learning economy at last, and he made a mental note of the fact that you could completely stay the very worst pangs of hunger with a piece of lunch-cake costing a penny.

On returning to the offices of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co., he was informed that Mr. Plumbridge had asked for him, and that he had missed his turn. However, if he cared to call up at twelve o'clock the next morning, Mr. Plumbridge would endeavour to give him a couple of minutes. It would have been obvious to the experienced, although Andrew was not yet wise enough to recognise the signs, that Mr. Plumbridge had been reading his answers to the questions.

Andrew hastened back to Buckingham Street. Whilst he was waiting for the door to be opened, a rather shabby individual, who had been apparently lurking in the next doorway, came up to him and touched his hat.

"Excuse me, sir, but could you tell me where the offices of a paper called 'The Straight Tip' are to be found?"

"Certainly," replied Andrew. "The offices of 'The Straight Tip' are on the first floor of this house."

"Thank you, sir. Would you very kindly oblige me with the name of the Editor?"

"Well," said Andrew, "there are two Editors. Mr. Leviticus Foottit is the chief Editor, and Mr. Theophilus Crichton is the Sporting-Editor. I," he added, unable to resist a tiny little bit of swagger, "am the Assistant-Editor."

"Indeed?" said the shabby man politely. "And might I venture to ask your name, sir?"

"My name is Andrew Dick."

The shabby man unexpectedly produced a note-book and pencil, and wrote busily for a few moments. "Leviticus Foottit, Theophilus Crichton, and Andrew Dick," he read. "Thank you very much, sir. I merely wanted to know because I have taken a great fancy to the paper, and may be able to do you gentlemen a bit of good. Good-afternoon, sir."

He strolled away, and Andrew went up to the office. He found both the Editors present, Mr. Crichton sitting in front of his little typewriter, with a wet towel bound round his head, and Mr. Foottit carefully counting a bundle of postal-orders. As Andrew entered, the latter looked at him severely.

"Ah, my young friend from Oxford, so here you are at last. This is not the way to become a successful and prosperous proprietor of newspapers, my young friend from Oxford. Work, work, work—that's the only thing! Look at me! Look at my worthy friend Theophilus Crichton! Do *we* spend the whole day gadding about London, seeing the sights and amusing ourselves? Do you find *us* feeding the bears at the Zoo, or peering into the face of Henry the Eighth at Madam Tussaud's? Certainly not. Much

as we may be tempted to do these things, we refrain. My friend Theophilus Crichton and I stick to business. That is why we have reached positions of eminence in our profession. I am sorry, very sorry, to observe this laxity in one who has all his career before him, who has still to cleave his way through the forest, who is but at the foot of the mountain."

Andrew explained that he went out because he had a business appointment, and there was nothing to do in the office.

"Nothing to do?" cried Mr. Foottit. "Nothing to do? You hear that, Theophilus? Our young friend from Oxford actually says there was nothing to do, and here is the table loaded with proofs to read, and articles to be cut and revised, and letters to be written, and envelopes to be addressed, and his own leader still to be knocked off."

"I wrote the leader yesterday," Andrew protested, "but somebody made a spill of the first two sheets, and poured some whisky or something over the rest."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Mr. Foottit. "Then I think I know the culprit; I think I can place my finger with unerring instinct upon the guilty person—it must have been Jane. That girl will make spills out of anything. She would make a spill out of a five-pound-note if I was careless enough to leave one lying on the table. She has no reverence for literature—not the slightest spark of reverence. She treats me and my friend Theophilus Crichton as though we were ordinary beings, no better than the miserable clerks who occupy the cupboards in this house. I shall have to speak very severely to Jane, and perhaps to her

mistress. In the meantime, Mr. Dick, I will trouble you to write me another leader."

Andrew complied, but before beginning, just by way of restoring himself to favour with the great men, he told Mr. Foottit of his interview with the shabby man on the doorstep. The effect of this piece of news was astonishing. Mr. Crichton turned slowly in his chair, holding his head with both hands, and stared wildly, first at Andrew, then at Mr. Foottit, and then at Andrew again. Mr. Foottit rose to his feet, his mouth open, his face pale, and stared hard at Andrew.

"What sort of man was this?" he gasped at last.

"A rather tall man," said Andrew.

"Square-shouldered?"

"Yes, he was rather square-shouldered."

"Short hair?"

"Yes, I did notice that he had short hair, rather as though he might have been in the Army."

"Did you look at his boots?"

"Yes, I looked at him pretty well all over. I have a habit of observing people close. I suppose it's what they call in the reviews the gift of observation."

"Damn the reviews," snapped Mr. Foottit. "What sort of boots was this man wearing?"

"They were black boots, stoutly made, in a good state of repair, and rather large."

"In fact, the boots were a bit too good for the suit, eh?"

"Yes, now you come to mention it, I think the boots were certainly too good for the suit."

"Then will you kindly leave us alone for a moment? I wish to speak privately with my friend Theophilus Crichton."

Andrew obeyed, taking his leader with him up to the attic. He wondered very much why Mr. Foottit and Mr. Crichton were so frightened merely because a man in a shabby suit and good boots wished to do them a good turn. It was quite obvious that they were frightened, very frightened indeed. Was it possible, he asked himself, with a sudden jump as the idea came to him, that they had brought themselves within the meshes of the law by accepting money from their readers to put on horses? If that was the case, he would be in it as well, for he had most distinctly told the man his name, and that he was the Assistant-Editor of the paper. Here was another ghastly blunder! He turned as white as Mr. Foottit himself as he suddenly saw a picture of the three of them standing together in the dock.

What should he do? Sneak out of the house that night and get clear away? That thought certainly occurred to him, but he at once thrust it aside as being dishonourable and unworthy. Sylvia, he knew, would not approve that course of action. Whatever happened, he must stand by his colleagues. He would explain to the magistrate, or the judge, or whoever it was, that he had not been on the staff of the paper much more than twenty-four hours, and had never received a penny from it, and had nothing whatever to do with the sporting side. Still, that would not keep his name out of the papers; he would figure as a defendant in a disreputable police court case, if not as a prisoner. Sylvia would be sure to hear about it; Mr. Plumbridge would read the report; his name would be branded. He might change it afterwards, but people would find out; people always did. He

saw himself trailing about the world like Joseph Conrad's hero who had once been guilty of cowardice, and could find no rest for the sole of his foot to the end of his days. Yes, that was what would happen to him, but he must see it through. He must not desert his colleagues.

He saw nothing more of Mr. Foottit or Mr. Crichton that night. Having finished his leader, he took it down to the office, but they had gone out. Andrew had had nothing to eat since the lunch-cake, so he, too, went and had a meal—a light and economical meal. Then he went to bed, and dreamed of judges in red robes and black caps, and a crowded court, and thousands of people pointing fingers of scorn at him, and Sylvia turning her back upon him and walking off arm in arm with the curate from Eastwood.

When he came down to breakfast the next morning, he was met in the hall by Mrs. Doubikin.

"Well," said that lady, "you'll 'ave the breakfuss-room ter yerself this mornin', Mr. Dick."

"How's that?" asked Andrew.

"Mr. Foottit and Mr. Crichton 'as left."

"What?" he almost yelled.

"They's left—left late last night. Mr. Foottit said as 'e was very anxious to say goodbye ter yew, but 'e wouldn't 'ave yer disturbed, not on no account. 'E was always a very thoughtful gentleman, was Mr. Foottit—one of the nicest and most thoughtful gentlemen I ever 'ad in the 'ouse."

"But where have they gone? Mr. Foottit has got some money of mine! Besides, he engaged me to work on his paper! And then——"

He stopped himself on the point of telling Mrs.

Doubikin about the shabby man. It was evident from her beaming countenance that Mr. Foottit had taken good care to leave on excellent terms with his landlady. That, of course, would be because he had to depend upon her to forward his letters, and he would want his letters, more particularly the ones containing postal-orders. The whole thing was a plant, and Mrs. Doubikin had become a party to it.

Mrs. Doubikin smiled and shook her head. "I wasn't to say where they've gone to," she replied. "No doubt Mr. Foottit'll be writin' to you hisself—he's such a thoughtful gentleman. Now don't you go worritin' yerself, dearie. It'll all be all right, you mark my words. Mr. Foottit isn't the gentleman ter go and do the wrong thing by anybody, that I can assure yew. If yer take my advice, you'll set down an' 'ave yer breakfuss, and then everything'll be sure to come all right. I often tell Mr. Doubikin, when 'e's a bit 'ipped, ter set down an' 'ave a meal, because everything always comes all right after a meal. Now you jest pop into the breakfuss-room an' I'll send Jane up with yer breakfuss."

CHAPTER X

ANDREW, HAVING CLASHED WITH THE DOUBIKINS, CANNONS OFF THEM INTO MR. PLUMBRIDGE

IT was now of paramount importance to Andrew that he should succeed in obtaining a scholastic appointment without delay. Whilst it would be too much to say, perhaps, that starvation stared him in the face, he was certainly coming very near to utter destitution. There was no relation to whom he could turn, and his pride absolutely forbade him to appeal for help to any of his father's friends or his own Oxford acquaintances. At the age of twenty-one or thereabouts, and in a youth of such keen susceptibilities as Andrew, pride is as strong an instinct as may be found in the human composition. Just as some things are unthinkable to the civilised human being, even in the hours of greatest extremity—and it is an undisputed fact that many men of comparatively coarse fibre and little education have died of starvation in open boats at sea rather than desecrate the dead bodies of their companions—so it was unthinkable for a lad of Andrew's temperament to acknowledge to those who had known him in comfortable circumstances but a few months before that he was now rapidly nearing the point when he would not know where to look for his next meal. He simply could not do it. Rather than that, he would undertake any kind of drudgery.

Luckily, his clothes would be worth something at a pawn-shop, but the money he could raise in this manner would not last him very long, and it was impossible for him to accept any scholastic post that might be offered unless he had a sufficient supply of good clothes to take with him.

To add to his alarm, before he had finished his breakfast, the good Mrs. Doubikin, bravely doing her duty by Mr. Doubikin, presented him with his bill. The week, of course, was not yet up, but Mrs. Doubikin was an expert in estimating to a nicety the financial condition of her lodgers. Whether she knew that Mr. Foottit had managed to abstract the greater part of his small capital, or whether she feared that Andrew would follow the example of his seniors and make good his escape from the house, he could not decide; the main fact was that she laid the bill upon the table and informed him that that was the day when she made it a rule for all accounts to be settled.

Andrew looked at the bill, which ran as follows:—

Apartments	10/—
Attendance	2/—
Lights	1/—
Seven breakfusses	7/—
Use of first floor	5/—
Breakages	4/6
Total	£1. 9. 6.

The amount startled Andrew, and he added it up with some care.

"Oh, it's all right," said Mrs. Doubikin. "I don't never make no mistakes in my bills. There may be some as does that, and not many doors away, neither,

but nobody can't accuse me of nothing of the sort." Mrs. Doubikin seemed to have great faith in the virtue of the negative. She could crowd enough negatives into one short sentence to have affirmed anything under the sun.

"I don't quite understand," said Andrew, "what you mean by 'use of first floor.' "

"Well, yer did use it, didn't yer?"

"Yes, but only as Mr. Foottit's employee."

"I can't 'elp what yer used it as. It stands ter reason, if yew uses a room, yer must expect ter pay fer it. There yer sets, wearin' out my chairs an' my carpet, an' yer can't expect ter 'ave all them privlidges fer a mere thankyew. I 'ope I know my duty by Mr. Doubikin better'n ter allow that."

"But I understood that Mr. Foottit had taken the room, and was paying you for it?"

"What you understood, my good young man, and what's the facks of the case is another matter. I made my arrangements with Mr. Foottit, and what arrangements Mr. Foottit made 'e abode by; that's a private matter between me an' Mr. Foottit. What I ses ter yew is, yew 'ad parshul use of the first-floor front, an' so yew must expect ter pay fer it. All said an' done, five shillings ain't much fer the privlidge of settin' in a room like that there. Me an' Mr. Doubikin 'as ter set in the kitching in order as you gents might do yer writin' an' what not in comfort, so why shouldn't we be compensed? Answer me that!"

Poor Andrew perceived that this was an interminable argument. If the woman chose to do him out of five shillings, he would have to pay it, or else walk out of the house leaving all his belongings behind

him. He did not at all fancy a wrestle with Mr. Doubikin in the hall or on the doorstep. He was in quite sufficient trouble without figuring in a police court as the hero or the villain of a Buckingham Street scrap.

"Then there's another item," he observed. "You've charged me four-and-sixpence for breakages. Would you kindly tell me what I've broken?"

"There's two things," replied Mrs. Doubikin, truculently. It was the truculence of the bully who has a poor cause but the stronger arm. "There's the jug an' the wallpaper."

"The jug and the wallpaper?" repeated Andrew, staring at her with frank amazement. "What have I done either to the jug or the wallpaper?"

"Yer've chipped the jug, which spoils the 'ole set, an' yer've tore the wallpaper, which means as I shall 'ave ter 'ave the 'ole room repapered. If I did my duty by Mr. Doubikin, which, thank God, I mostly does, I should charge yew fourteen-an'-six instead of four-an'-six. But I never was one ter be 'ard on young men, an' so I'm lettin' yer down light."

"But I haven't the slightest recollection of either chipping the jug or tearing the wallpaper," protested Andrew.

"That's very likely. Young men as keeps the hours as you keeps very often can't recklect of a mornin' what they done overnight. If it wasn't fer me 'eart, I'd climb up ter that there room this moment, an' show yer just where that jug's bin chipped an' that wallpaper's bin tore. But me 'eart's that bad I daren't attempt it. All I can say is, if yew don't believe me, if yew can't take the word of an honest woman, the

best thing I can do is ter call down the stairs fer Mr. Doubikin."

She stepped towards the door, and called, "Halgernon!"

Andrew felt some natural curiosity about Mr. Doubikin. He had never yet seen his landlord, nor had he even heard him. Occasionally the aroma of strong tobacco came floating up from the kitchen, but that was the only sign of existence that Mr. Doubikin had yet given. He never appeared to carry luggage up the stairs, or to open the door, or to take a message. He did not even fetch the beer from the neighbouring public-house; that sacred duty was always entrusted to the cheerful Jane.

"Halgernon!" repeated Mrs. Doubikin in a louder voice. "Just step up 'ere a moment, will yer? I want yer."

During the pause that followed, Mrs. Doubikin stood close to the door of the breakfast-room as though prepared to prevent Andrew's dash for liberty should he intend such a step. Andrew, for his part, went on eating his breakfast and trying to preserve an appearance of unruffled calm; as a matter of fact, he was feeling extremely uncomfortable, not to say distinctly nervous. He did not apprehend personal violence from Mr. Doubikin; indeed, he would rather have welcomed a quiet bout in the back-room as a relief to his overcharged feelings. What he did fear, could he have defined his feelings, was a vulgar public row into which some of the other lodgers, and possibly some of the neighbours, might be dragged, and the publicity which would follow. These people had nothing to fear from publicity; he had everything.

Presently there was a shuffling noise in the passage without, and then Mr. Doubikin, aided by a push in the back from his wife, shot through the doorway of the breakfast-room. He was a cadaverous individual, with hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, and a loose yellow skin. He wore a straggling moustache, beard, and whiskers; these were grown, apparently, more for the sake of avoiding the trouble of shaving than because Mr. Doubikin took an interest in his personal appearance. His clothes were old and greasy, and his hands trembled slightly all the time he was in the room as though he suffered from some mild form of palsy. He had a pipe in his mouth—a straight briar pipe, very short, and very battered as to the bowl. Andrew identified the tobacco as the same that had occasionally been smoked in the kitchen below. This morning orgy of luxury lent weight to his suspicion that Mr. Foottit had done well by the Doubikins before leaving.

"This 'ere young man," said Mrs. Doubikin, "'as as good as called me a liar ter me very face. Are yew goin' ter stand there, Mr. Doubikin, an' 'ear me insulted?"

Mr. Doubikin, who had kept his eyes steadily directed towards Andrew from the very moment that he had entered the room, advanced one pace in the direction of his lodger.

"I did nothing of the kind," replied Andrew, as quickly as possible. "Mrs. Doubikin has charged me four-and-sixpence for breakages. I said that, to the best of my belief, I had not broken anything, or even damaged anything."

"Yew 'ear that? What d'yer think of it? 'E's

chipped the jug an' tore the wallpaper. I've told 'im so till I'm almost black in the face, ter say nothing of me' eart comin' on that bad that I might drop down dead at 'is feet without a moment's notice, an' 'e's the face ter 'sinuate as I'm tryin' ter do 'im. Are you goin' ter stand there, Mr. Doubikin, an' 'ear me insulted?"

Mr. Doubikin, who had not removed his eyes from Andrew's face for a single second, advanced another pace. Andrew judged that it was time to get to his feet.

"I am quite willing to pay anything that is right and proper," he said, "but I don't think it fair that I should be charged four-and-six for things that I didn't do."

"'Ark at that!" shouted Mrs. Doubikin. "For the third time, Mr. Doubikin, are yew goin' ter stand there like a sausage an' 'ear me insulted?"

Mr. Doubikin took a third pace forward, and at last said, in a voice so low and husky that Andrew scarcely caught the remark, "Pig."

Andrew did not know whether to laugh or to be angry. He wanted to laugh, but he felt that it was due to his dignity to assume anger. He therefore replied, in a tone that he hoped sounded haughtily contemptuous, "You'd better be careful what you're saying."

Mr. Doubikin took a fourth pace forward, which brought him unpleasantly close to Andrew. Mrs. Doubikin, still guarding the door, sought by inflammatory words to bring the conflict to a crisis.

"And ter think," she bawled, "that I should live ter be treated in this way in me own 'ouse, an' in the

presence of me own lorful 'usband! Not content with ruinin' all the furniture in 'is room, which cost I don't know 'ow much, 'e must needs insult me, an' me in that state with me 'eart that I can 'ardly stand an' speak a word in me own defence! Mr. Doubikin, I'm ashamed of yer! I'm glad me pore mother never lived ter see this day!"

Mr. Doubikin, who had never removed his eyes from Andrew's face, again muttered in that almost inaudible husky voice, "Pig."

"Is that all yew can think of?" screamed Mrs. Doubikin. "Is that the only word yer've got in yer 'ed? Yew ain't 'alf a man, yew ain't! Why, there's Mrs. Drubb's 'usband next door, 'e'd 'ave called 'im everything under the sun by this time! There's a man as can stick up fer a woman! What a flow! What words! I've 'eard 'im lay 'is tongue to Mrs. Drubb until I could 'ave worshipped that man! An' as fer yew, standin' there almost like a dumb one, yew fair give me the sick! Get downstairs again if that's the best yer can do!"

Mr. Doubikin, still with his eyes on Andrew, backed slowly to the door, and disappeared. Mrs. Doubikin placed a chair for herself between the door and the end of the table and sat down.

"If yew think," she said, "that I'm the woman ter let meself be beat by one of yore sort, yore makin' the biggest mistake that ever yew made in yore puff. I've bin lettin' apartments too long fer that, my young gentleman. I shall stay 'ere until yew brasses up, so don't yew make no blooming error about thet."

And she would. Andrew felt that she would. For the first time in his life he realised the utter reckless-

ness of an angry woman. Mrs. Doubikin, of course, was absolutely in the wrong; he had not chipped the jug, neither had he torn the wallpaper. But how could he prove it? What could the lad do? Physically he might be more than a match for Mrs. Doubikin, but she would scream the house down, if not the street down, should he attempt to force his way past her. He decided to resort to strategy.

"Very well," he replied. "I don't admit that I've done this damage for which you have charged me, nor do I think it fair that I should be asked to pay for the use of a room which Mr. Foottit has presumably settled for, but rather than have any more of this unpleasantness, I will give you the money. It is upstairs," he added. "I will go and fetch it."

Mrs. Doubikin preceded him from the room, and again seated herself just inside the front door, so that it would be quite impossible for Andrew to leave the house until the bill was paid. Seeing that he was outwitted, he went up to his attic, took thirty shillings out of his suit-case, and transferred it to the eager, capacious, and grubby palm of Mrs. Doubikin. That lady immediately became all smiles and maternal solicitude. She was exceedingly sorry that there had been any words over the matter. She had taken a great fancy to Andrew from the first, and she wished for nothing more than to make him happy and comfortable. She hoped that he would not cherish any resentment, but would remain in her house as long as his visit to London lasted, and would often return thither on subsequent occasions. She would fetch him his sixpence change and receipt the bill. After all,

he must bear in mind that she was a poor woman, and had to do her duty by Mr. Doubikin.

With his last sovereign and the receipted bill in his pocket, Andrew left the house to keep his appointment with Mr. Plumbridge. As he made his way up Buckingham Street, he thought he caught sight of the shabby man in the too-good boots, but could not be quite certain.

The suspicious clerk at the offices of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co. received him with considerable hauteur, and curtly informed him that Mr. Plumbridge was engaged. Andrew waited about half-an-hour, and then had the satisfaction of seeing a short man with a prominent waistcoat and a loud voice emerge from an inner office with a tall, broad-shouldered, red-faced, stupid-looking youth who had made a definite place for himself in the world by throwing a hammer weighing sixteen pounds a distance of a hundred-and-fifty-one feet. The red-faced young man seemed fully conscious of his importance in the universal scheme, and Mr. Plumbridge was evidently conscious of it as well. He was grasping the red-faced young man affectionately by the left biceps, and conducting him gently, even obsequiously, to the door.

"Very well, then," he was saying, "I shall at once communicate with these people, and let you have a line at the earliest possible moment. I quite agree with you, as you know, that all your demands are justified, and I think I can assure you that if I say they are justified they will be acceded to at once."

"Eh?" said the red-faced young man.

"I say that I think your demands will be acceded to—that is, granted—at once."

"Oh," said the red-faced young man.

"Yes, yes. Very well, then. Good-morning, good-morning! Run in any time that you wish to see me! You will find me entirely at your disposal."

The red-faced young man cannoned against the door-post, ricocheted on to the other door-post, and so made his way, with no little grace, into the street. Mr. Plumbridge, having seen him safely on to the pavement, cast one withering glance at Andrew, returned to his office, and slammed the door. Twenty minutes later, a bell rang in the outer office, and the suspicious clerk informed Andrew that Mr. Plumbridge would now see him.

His nerves thoroughly shaken by the well-known process of being kept waiting, Andrew at last entered the great presence. Mr. Plumbridge was writing, and he went on writing for some little time. It was during this period that a little devil entered into the boy's brain, and made him ask himself why in the world he should be treated in this fashion by a man like Plumbridge.

We need hardly say that Andrew was quite young. He should have been very grateful to Mr. Plumbridge for seeing him at all, and should have meekly waited as long as Mr. Plumbridge cared to keep him standing in front of his desk. But Andrew was getting a little tired of things in general. He did not care very much, at this moment, what happened to him. He felt that the world was being a little too much for him, and so, with the natural impatience of youth, he felt inclined to turn upon the world and return kick for kick. Mr. Plumbridge being the nearest representative of the world at the moment, Andrew ached to kick Mr.

Plumbridge. His blood tingled at the thought; he could imagine just how Mr. Plumbridge would feel to kick. At the moment, probably, Andrew was a little mad.

"Good-morning," he said suddenly, in a loud voice.

Mr. Plumbridge jumped. Then, pretending he hadn't jumped, he looked up and favoured Andrew with the well-known stare that had shot terror into so many young hearts.

"Sit down," he said, waving his pen towards a vacant chair.

"Thank you," said Andrew, and remained standing.

Mr. Plumbridge, just as a matter of principle, returned to his writing for a few moments. Then he laid down the pen, leaned back in his chair, placed the tips of his fingers together, drew down his brows, and looked searchingly at Andrew.

"And what," he asked ponderously, "can I do for you?"

"I believe," observed Andrew, "you are a scholastic agent, are you not?"

"I am," said Mr. Plumbridge.

"Then I shall be obliged if, in consideration of the usual commission, you will find me a post."

"What is your name?" asked Mr. Plumbridge.

"My name is Andrew Dick. I filled in a very long paper in this office yesterday, and I waited about three hours because you said that you would see me. In the end I was told that you could not see me, but would see me to-day at twelve. To-day I have waited rather more than one hour."

"All this is very interesting," observed Mr. Plumbridge, "but scarcely to the point. When I tell you,

Mr.—er—Dick, that something like one thousand young men pass through my hands every year, you will understand that I am a very busy man, and cannot see complete strangers, who have not troubled to make appointments, at a moment's notice. Here, I see, is your paper. You omit to mention whether you have taken your degree, Mr. Dick."

"No," said Andrew, "I have not taken my degree."

"That is a pity. There is a prejudice—an old-fashioned prejudice, if you like, but still a prejudice—amongst schoolmasters in favour of men who have taken their degrees. I should advise you, Mr. Dick, to take yours at the earliest possible moment. Have you had any previous experience in scholastic work?"

"No," said Andrew. "I have had no experience in any kind of work. I am a thoroughly idle, useless, and ignorant person. But as I happen to know of hundreds of other thoroughly idle, useless, and ignorant persons who had no difficulty in obtaining assistant-masterships, I ventured to think that I might do the same."

"You are certainly very outspoken, Mr. Dick. It is quite true, I regret to say, that the scholastic profession is peppered all over with the class of person that you describe, but that class of person does not obtain the salary that you demand, nor does that class of person pass through my hands. I never send a man to a school unless I perceive in him some very definite qualifications for the profession of his adoption. Do you play football, Mr. Dick?"

"Extremely badly."

"Association or Rugby?"

"Association."

"That is just as well. My principals, of course, prefer men who are good at games, but they cannot all afford to pay for first-class games. The less important schools have to be content with second-class games, and the third-rate schools, I presume, put up with very bad games. But I need hardly say that I know nothing of those. What sort of references can you give, Mr. Dick?"

"I could refer you," said Andrew, "to the Reverend John Gehazi Stiffkey, who was my Theological tutor at Oxford, but he's no good at games, either. I don't suppose he could even play battledore and shuttlecock."

"I should not refer to Mr. Stiffkey for a testimonial as to your games, but rather for diligence and good-conduct."

"Stiffkey knows nothing whatever about my conduct, not having been my moral tutor, and I'm afraid he would give me a very poor testimonial for diligence."

"Indeed? You seem determined to make the worst of yourself, Mr. Dick."

"Oh, I don't know that. You can see for yourself what I am. I can talk the King's English, and I don't eat peas with my knife, and I suppose I've got enough intelligence to drill the elements of Latin grammar into a lot of dirty-nosed little boys. I don't suppose I should get drunk, nor should I attempt to elope with the headmaster's wife. My clothes are not in rags, I take a bath every morning, and I don't owe anybody a penny. If you can get a thousand young men in this office every year who can truthfully say as much as that, your job must be a very pleasant and light one."

Mr. Plumbridge rose. "Mr. Dick," he said solemnly, "I am afraid you are trifling with a very serious matter. Amongst all the qualifications that you have mentioned, you have omitted one that is absolutely necessary if you wish to succeed as an assistant-master, namely, humility. If you had a splendid athletic record, such as the gentleman with whom I have just had the great pleasure of conversing, or if you had distinguished yourself in the Schools, there might be some excuse for the arrogance of your tone, although even then I should deplore it. As it is, I have to inform you that I can do nothing whatever for you. I should not feel easy in my mind if I was responsible for introducing such a firebrand as you appear to be into any well-ordered, well-disciplined, and peaceful community. My advice to you is to think things over very carefully, and then, if you do not see your way to treating your seniors and betters with due respect, abandon once and for all the notion of entering this very great, very responsible, and very noble profession. Good-morning."

The suspicious-looking clerk was holding open the door. Andrew stalked through it, and flung into the empty street.

CHAPTER XI

A VERY SORDID CHAPTER. BETTER SKIP IT

ANDREW fortified himself after this interview with another piece of lunch-cake, and then went for a long walk to think things out. What was the next move? He had one sovereign now between himself and starvation—or the unspeakable humiliation of having to beg. Even if he managed to get an article written and accepted, he would probably have to wait a month before he was paid for it. Besides, in his worried mental condition it was more difficult than ever to hit upon an idea that would prove instantly saleable. He had queered his pitch with Plumbridge, Slice & Co. That was a pity, and yet the memory of the scene with Mr. Plumbridge gave him more satisfaction than any experience that he had had since he came to London. He knew quite well that, under similar circumstances, he would behave in a precisely similar way.

As he toiled up towards Hampstead, he thought with increasing bitterness of the years and the money that he had wasted at Oxford. He was not hypocrite enough to regret the fact that he had idled; he knew that he would not have idled had the task set before him been the right task. If, at the age of eighteen, his father had sent him as an apprentice to the office of the local weekly paper, he would not now be tramp-

ing London with only a sovereign in his pocket, and no notion as to where the next could be obtained. He would have had a grounding in his profession; he would be able to walk into a London office with proper credentials. At present he had ability without technique; in London offices they demanded men with both ability and technique. He realised that, and deplored the short-sightedness that had thrust him into the regular groove.

He was beginning to lose his faith in the infallibility of his elders. He was beginning to see that education in England is a convention rather than a science, and he was beginning to realise how many brilliant careers are blighted even before they begin by the lack of imagination of those who have the authority to attempt to force square pegs into round holes. And then, getting a little light-headed with hunger, he dreamed of an England in the far, far distant future, in which the tastes and temperaments of children might be studied individually; in which the whole system of routine education might be a thing of the gruesome and unimaginative dark ages; in which, for example, a boy should not be taught to associate the name of a foreign country with a list of dull imports and exports that had to be learnt by heart; in which the History of England should not be degraded in the youthful mind to a mere list of very bad kings and very good kings who ascended the throne on a certain date and reigned for so many years; in which Latin and Greek should be worshipped for their beauty rather than loathed for the irregularities, masticated in one horrid chunk, of their grammars; in which literature should not be considered

as beneath the contempt of such brilliant beings as schoolmasters and dons; in which it might be recognised that French can only be learnt on French soil, and German on German soil; in which, above all, there were no such hideous torture-chambers for little children as the average schoolroom. . . .

On returning to the house in Buckingham Street, the hour being now about six o'clock, Andrew found, seated upon Mrs. Doubikin's chair in the dark and musty-smelling hall-passage, the man in the shabby clothes and the too-good boots. Jane, who opened the door to Andrew, intimated that the "gentleman" had called to see Mr. Foottit and Mr. Crichton, but, finding them not at home, had remained to see Mr. Dick. Half guessing at the nature of the man's errand, Andrew took the liberty of leading him into the empty breakfast-room, and then closed the door. No sooner were they alone together than the man in shabby clothes produced an official-looking document, which, he informed Andrew, was a warrant for his arrest.

"What am I charged with?" asked Andrew, feeling almost indifferent to this last blow of Fortune.

"Well, sir, if you'll kindly walk with me as far as the Station, the charge will be read over to you there. All I have to do, you see, is to show my warrant and take you into custody."

"Are you a policeman?" asked Andrew.

"Yes, sir. I've been on this job for the last week or two, and a fine old wigging I shall get when I tell the Chief that the other two blokes have given me the slip. How they got away I don't know, seeing as the house was under supervision night and day,

but I've got my suspicions. Now, sir, if you wouldn't mind just stepping as far as Night Street with me, you'll soon know what it's all about. I ought to warn you that anything you say will be taken down and used in evidence against you."

"Are you going to—to handcuff me?"

"Why, no, sir, I don't think that will be necessary. You just give me your word that you won't try to make a bolt for it, and we can walk up there together without anybody being a penny the wiser. Anyone can see you're a gentleman, and I find that, nine times out of ten, you can trust a gentleman when he gives his word."

"Certainly I will give you my word," said Andrew.

"Very good, sir. We may as well start at once."

They went out into the passage, and were making for the front door when the sight of the little table on which letters always lay brought Andrew to a halt.

"Shall I be back here this evening?" he whispered to the constable.

"Why, yes, sir, I should think so."

"Because there may be a very important letter for me, and I shouldn't like it to get lost."

"Don't you worry about that, sir. Any letters that come here addressed to you will be well taken care of. I shall see to that."

Andrew, marvelling at the solicitude with which he seemed to be suddenly surrounded now that he had come into contact with the Law, walked up to Night Street Police Station alongside the young constable in plain clothes. A few people looked at them curiously as they passed; one or two loafers, who evidently recognised the type of Andrew's companion, muttered

jeering comments; the rest of the world hurried by on its business.

They passed through the large open doorway—open all day and all night for the convenience of the miserable weaklings of the neighbourhood who succumbed to the lure of cheap alcohol as naturally as wasps succumb to the fatal mess of beer and sugar—and entered a large and rather shabby room with a desk in the centre, benches round the walls, and a glass partition through which the Inspector on duty and his assistants could be seen busily writing at high desks. This was the "Charge Room." Andrew was told by the constable in plain clothes to stand before the desk, whilst another constable in uniform went to fetch the Inspector.

The reading of the charge did not occupy more than a minute or two. Andrew found that he was accused of conspiring with Leviticus Foottit and Theophilus Crichton, through the agency of a weekly journal entitled "The Straight Tip," to contravene the laws of His Majesty the King known as the Lottery and Gaming Act. He was further informed that he might make a statement if he so desired, but, if he did so, it would be used in the evidence to be placed before the magistrate on the following morning. He was further informed that he had the right to apply to be released for the night on bail.

"Does that mean that I have to find a certain sum of money?" he asked.

"It means that you will have to furnish the names of two respectable householders who are prepared to guarantee your appearance at the Court to-morrow

morning, or, if you fail to appear, to pay over a substantial sum of money."

"And what happens if I can't give you the names of two respectable householders?"

"In that case, sir," said the Inspector, not unkindly, "we shall have to detain you for the night."

"Do you mean that you will lock me up in a cell?"

The Inspector and the constable in plain clothes and the other constables who were standing about smiled broadly.

"Well, sir, I'm afraid we have no very nice bedrooms at our disposal."

"All right," said Andrew. "Lock me up."

The Inspector looked surprised. "Are you quite sure, sir, that you would not care to communicate with any of your friends? I shall be very glad to send one of my men with a message."

"I have no friends," replied Andrew. "At least, not in London."

"Are they too far from town for us to get at them?"

"Yes, they are too far for you to get at them—thank God."

"Very good, sir. Take the gentleman away, Bates, and make him as comfortable as you can."

Constable Bates led Andrew from the Charge Room into a long corridor that contained a number of small doors with little apertures in them about the height of a man's eyes from the ground. Some of these doors were open, and some of them were shut. Glancing, as he passed, through the aperture of one of the doors that were shut, Andrew was startled to find a pair of eyes gazing out at him. The eyes were bloodshot, and the face in which they were set was white

and thin, with greyish, stubbly hair on the chin and cheek-bones. That look made him shudder. He had never before seen a prisoner in a cell, and it was awful to think of a human creature locked up in a little box like a dangerous animal in a cage.

"Say, guv'nor, what's the time?" growled the man in a sodden voice.

"Time?" replied the constable. "Half-past six."

They passed on. The door of the next cell stood open, and Constable Bates invited Andrew to enter. Andrew obeyed, and found himself in a small compartment about eight feet long, and six feet wide. A broad wooden bench, about six feet in length, was fixed to one of the walls. For the rest, the cell was quite empty.

Nothing could have been simpler or more effective. Here a prisoner could do no damage whatever either to himself or to His Majesty's property. If he screamed, or sang, or laughed, or shouted, there was nobody to hear him but the other prisoners, who deserved it, and the constable on duty, who was used to it. Andrew realised that he was separated merely by the thickness of a wall from that awful creature in the next cell with the staring bloodshot eyes, the haggard face, and the sodden voice. To such a pass had he come in a few days, thanks to his unbounded confidence in his own ability!

"I shall 'ave to just run through yer pockets," said Constable Bates. "We generally does that in the Charge Room, but I thought you might find it more privit-like 'ere."

Andrew was soon relieved of all his possessions, Mr. Bates promising to put them aside very carefully,

and let him have them intact at the earliest possible moment. He then enquired whether Andrew would like any food or drink. In spite of his agitating experiences, Andrew felt distinctly hungry, having had nothing to eat since the piece of lunch-cake after his interview with Mr. Plumbridge. At the same time, he dared not spend very much of his last sovereign, having a vague idea that it might be sufficient to pay the fine and costs in the morning.

"Thank you," he said. "Do you know if there's an A.B.C. shop anywhere in the neighbourhood?"

"Why, yes, sir," replied Mr. Bates. "There's one just round the corner."

"Oh," said Andrew. "Then, if you wouldn't mind getting me a piece of lunch-cake, I shall be much obliged."

"Lunch-cake?" repeated Constable Bates. "That don't seem much fer a young gentleman fer 'is supper!"

"Thank you," said Andrew, with dignity, "I am very fond of lunch-cake. They ought to give you quite a large piece for a penny."

"Very good, sir. Anything to drink with it?"

"I think I'll have a cup of cocoa."

"All right, sir. I'll attend to it at once."

He went out of the cell, shut the door, and turned the key. Andrew was now a prisoner. He looked about him for a minute or two with curiosity; then he sat down on the wooden bench, leant his back against the wall, plunged his hands into his empty pockets, and let his chin sink on to his chest. Had he known it, that was precisely the attitude adopted by

nine men out of every ten who find themselves in the cells at Night Street.

Suddenly a man in a cell a little further down the passage began to sing. There was no music in the song, and no mirth; it was just a drunken wail of a music-hall song popular at the moment. There was a dreadful sort of energy, born of the lees of alcohol, behind the tune. On and on it went, and then the man in the next cell to Andrew began to curse the singer. At first his curses were mere mutterings, but presently they became louder, and Andrew was compelled to listen to the filthy outpourings of that degraded soul. He felt suddenly sick and faint—partly, of course, because he was beginning to lose strength from underfeeding. When Constable Bates returned with the lunch-cake and cocoa, Andrew thought at first that he would be unable to touch either, but at last he made a gallant effort, and the rest was easier than he had expected.

The evening drew on, and gradually the other cells filled up. In almost every case it was easy to judge that "drunk and disorderly" would be the charge on the morrow. Some of Andrew's companions sang as they were conducted to the cells, and some cursed, but none was silent. He could hear the shrill shouts of women, too, and judged from the sounds that they were being taken to cells overhead.

At last a comparative silence fell upon the corridor, and Andrew stretched himself on the hard plank-bed, and tried to sleep. He thought that he had been lying awake for hours, but in reality he fell asleep within the hour. And then came the dream that he never forgot as long as he lived.

It began at some cross-roads—deserted cross-roads, at dead of night, with a dark, thick wood in the back-ground. There was a man on a horse, and somehow it happened that this man was dragged from his horse by other men and murdered. Andrew witnessed the whole incident, but was unable to move or speak. He realised, as he saw the murderers dive into the woods, that he would be suspected of being concerned in the affair if he were found there; but still he could not move. Presently the police came up and arrested him.

Then the scene changed, and he was brought before the magistrates. The Court was quite a small one, unimportant, with no power but to commit him for trial at the sessions. He listened to the evidence, and could say no single word in his own defence. It was all terribly unjust, of course, terribly cruel, but he was trapped—trapped beyond the hope of escape. He heard the chief magistrate commit him for trial at the sessions, and then, as he was being taken away to the cell, he awoke.

At first he thought it was all real. He sat upright, and felt the wooden bed with his hands, and felt the bare brick walls behind him, and the stone floor with his feet. Good God! He would be hanged! There was no escape! Nobody could save him—not even Sylvia! . . . This awful bewilderment lasted only for a minute, however; then he remembered that he was merely passing the night in a cell at Night Street.

Andrew heaved a tremendous sigh of relief, and wondered what the time might be. The other prisoners were now fairly quiet, save for a rambling conversation from the cell at the very end of the pas-

sage in which, though he did not know it, three men who had been brought in late were locked up together. He peeped through the little aperture into the passage. A constable passed, and asked him if he wanted anything. Andrew replied that he would like to know the time, and the constable told him that it was half-past two. Once again Andrew stretched himself on the wooden bed—and then came the second half of his dream.

It was now the Assizes. He was in a large Court, crowded with people. The Judge was on the Bench. There were the barristers in their wigs, there were the policemen without their helmets, there were the reporters, there were the curious, sensation-loving crowd, waiting to hear him condemned to death. From his place in the dock he could pick out the faces of people he knew. Mr. Stiffkey had suddenly taken the place of the Judge, and Mr. Glead was the Foreman of the Jury. Mr. Crichton, Frankland, Mr. Socrates Quain, Mr. James Keep, and Mr. Douglas Campbell were also members of the jury, and Mr. Foottit was the usher. Mr. Plumbridge, quaintly enough, was the leading counsel for the defence; Andrew noted that fact with great misgivings. Sylvia and her mother were in Court side by side, and Aunt Ursula glared at him from a dark corner. Mr. Doubikin had been given a seat on the Bench, close to the Judge, into whose ear he was continually murmuring his favourite monosyllable.

They were all dead against him—he could see that at a glance. Everybody believed him guilty, even Sylvia. She looked very sad, very sympathetic, but very shocked. He could almost hear her saying, "How

could you have done such a dreadful thing, Andrew? You will have to be punished for it, just as you always used to be punished when you did anything naughty. Only this time the punishment will be very awful—it will be the last punishment you will ever receive."

Yes, they were all against him, but the trial had to go through to its appointed end. Presently came the luncheon interval, and two policemen—Constable Bates and the Inspector who had read over the charge—took him, as a matter of course, for a walk in the fresh air. They led him to a cemetery, which was full of flowers and sunlight, and they showed him a newly-dug grave, and told Andrew that it was meant for him. . . .

During the afternoon he gave up thinking about himself, and his sympathies went out to all the men who had stood in a similar position. He knew now exactly how it felt to be condemned to be hanged for murder—the absolute inevitability of it. The faces all hostile, the trapped feeling, the certainty that there was no power on earth that could save. He had often read quite callously of people being condemned to death; now he knew what it meant, and he wished that he had not read the accounts of these trials as a mere entertainment, just as one might read a novel.

Just as the Judge was on the point of pronouncing sentence, he woke up, and Constable Bates was standing in the doorway, asking him what he would like for breakfast. The reality of the two dreams was still on him; he could go over them point by point. He remembered perfectly well awaking after the first dream and asking the constable on duty the time, and being told that it was half-past two. Yes, he remem-

bered the minutest details, and he never forgot them as long as he lived. He never again read the account of a trial for murder without being able to place himself in the position of the person accused. For some years he even became a vigorous opponent of capital punishment. Later his views became more moderate, and he saw that nothing but the fear of a like fate for themselves would check those born without the sense of humanity from inflicting sudden death upon others.

"Get you anything fer breakfast, sir?"

"Thank you. I should like a piece of lunch-cake and some cocoa."

"Sure you won't take anything more substantial, sir?"

Andrew shivered. He had often heard of those about to be hanged eating a substantial breakfast before being led to the place of execution.

"No," he replied sharply.

"All right, sir. When you want a wash, there's a basin outside in the passage 'ere."

"When it's unoccupied," said Andrew, "I should very much like a wash."

The constable grinned. "It ain't very often it's occupied, sir. I expect you'll be able to 'ave it whenever you feel inclined."

So Andrew washed himself at the basin in the passage, conscious of a pair of bloodshot eyes watching him all the time through an aperture. Then he returned to his cell, and was once again locked in until the hour arrived for him to be taken across the yard to the Police Court.

Constable Bates fetched him about ten o'clock. An-

drew was allowed to walk across the yard without being handcuffed, and remained in the passage outside the Court Room instead of being placed in one of the little cells attached to the Court. Dishevelled men and women, generally alone, sometimes with a companion, were taken at intervals into the Court, remained there a few minutes, came out again, and were locked up in the cells. At last it was Andrew's turn.

The smallness of the Court surprised him. The room was no bigger than the drawing-room at home. It was divided up into numerous pens by wooden partitions. In one pen, which ran the length of the room, stood the general public, either to hear the cases against their friends and relations, or merely to gratify their curiosity and pass away an idle morning. The magistrate, a clean-faced gentleman with a tendency to smile which could not always be repressed, sat at the other end of the room on a dais, with a desk in front of him. To his right was another little pen for the use of the police, and then there was a pen for the reporters, a pen for the solicitors, a pen for witnesses, and, in the centre of the room, facing the magistrate, a narrow pen with iron rails for the prisoner. Into this, blushing hotly at the publicity of it all, Andrew was conducted, Constable Bates taking up a position near him.

The case was very soon stated. It seemed that the police had had their eye on Messrs. Foottit and Crichton for some little time. They had ample evidence that Messrs. Foottit and Crichton received sums of money in cash to put on horses. They had not even troubled to evade the Gaming Act. More than that, they had

run a lottery in connection with "The Straight Tip." Andrew had been arrested on his own confession that he was the Assistant-Editor of the paper, and a document had been found amongst his possessions which showed that he was also part proprietor of the paper. On the other hand, there was no previous conviction against him, he had been associated with Messrs. Foottit and Crichton not more than forty-eight hours, so far as the police could discover, and had not attempted to evade arrest. On the contrary, he had given the police no trouble whatever.

Mrs. Doubikin was called to give evidence as to the date of Andrew's arrival in Buckingham Street. She protested, with hands upraised, that she had never dreamed of such wicked things going on under her roof; if she had had the slightest suspicion of them, it would have been her duty to Mr. Doubikin to turn Messrs. Foottit and Crichton into the street at a moment's notice. Mr. Dick had only been with her a few nights, and had always behaved as a gentleman, and had paid his bill yesterday morning.

Mr. Doubikin was also called, but, as the magistrate could not hear what he said, he presently lost patience with the witness and told him to stand down.

Andrew was asked what he had to say in his defence. He thereupon told very quietly the story of his arrival in Buckingham Street, his conversation over the breakfast-table with Mr. Foottit, of the sale of the shares, of his appointment to the position of Assistant-Editor, and of his conversation with the constable in the shabby suit and the too-good boots. His innocence was perfectly evident to everybody present; the magistrate, acquitting him without a stain on his character, pointed

out that the police had done nothing more than their duty in arresting him, and that young men who came to London from the country without any previous knowledge of the wickedness of the great city could not be too careful in the selection of their associates. Andrew was then at liberty to leave the Court.

As he was passing through the hall outside the Court to the street he felt a touch at his elbow. Turning round, he saw a little man, young, unshaven, rather shabbily dressed, with long hair that hung over his collar at the back and over his eyes in front.

"Excuse me," said the little man. "I was in the Court just now. Heard your case. Daresay you noticed me in the reporter's box."

Andrew was obliged to confess that he had been too perturbed to notice anybody.

"Well, anyhow," went on the little man, "I was there, and I couldn't help trying to get a word with you. I know what it's like to come up from the country and try to get your footing in Fleet Street—bad enough, God knows, without getting mixed up in a rotten business like that. Shall we go and have a drink?"

Andrew thought of the magistrate's advice about the choice of associates, but there was something friendly and honest about the little man which appealed to him. Besides, he was not quite in the position to refuse friendship of any sort.

"All right," he replied, and off they went.

CHAPTER XII

MOST OF WHICH PASSES IN A LOW PUBLIC-HOUSE

THE little man led the way into the saloon-bar of a very dirty public-house, perched himself on a high stool, and asked Andrew what he would have.

"A whisky and soda, please," said Andrew, as carelessly as he could contrive.

"Any particular brand?"

"Oh, I don't think so, thanks."

The little man smiled. He was thinking what a feast of jam this tall, fresh-looking young man from the country must have proved for Messrs. Crichton and Foottit.

"Take my advice," he suggested. "Bottle of beer. Bread and cheese. Don't suppose you had a very good breakfast, did you?"

"Rotten," said Andrew. "By the way," he went on, feeling distinctly better for the refreshment, "did you say you were a reporter?"

"Well, I'm not exactly a reporter. Really a sub-editor. Staff of the Lightning News Agency. Ever heard of it?"

Andrew was bound to admit that he never had.

"No, daresay you haven't. Sometimes wish I'd never heard of it myself. Stick on there. We all do stick on there. Don't know why. Get less money

and more work than any set of men in Fleet Street. How some of the men who are married and have families live on their screws, can't imagine. I'm not married. Takes me all my time to make ends meet. That's why I do this reporting work in the day-time. Bit extra. Besides, it's all experience. Interesting types. Often think I'll write a novel one of these days. Shove 'em all into it."

"Were you," asked Andrew indifferently, "thinking of reporting my case?"

"Good Lord, no! You don't suppose I'd sell a pal for half-a-dollar, do you? Reminds me of a chestnut. Popular in the Street. Ever heard it? Rich man was brought into Court on a charge of a scandalous nature. When the trial was over, he leant across to the reporters' box and placed a shilling on the ledge. 'Just share that amongst you,' he said, 'and keep my name out of the papers.' Ever heard it?"

Andrew laughed at the little story, and felt that he was at last in touch with the real Fleet Street. They swapped names, and he discovered, rather to his surprise, that the little man was called Inchboard. There were some Inchboards in his own part of the world—rather important folk in the County.

"Of course, my people have nothing whatever to do with me, you know. I'm the disgrace of the family. Tried everything they knew to keep me in the straight and narrow path. Not a bit of good. Always straying off it. Governor cut me off with a shilling eleven times. Then he died. My brother offered to get me a job in Canada. Wasn't taking any. Not much. Too jolly cold out there. I'd rather stay here and be hired out at starvation wages by the Light-

ning News Agency. After all, what more do I want? I do as I like when I'm not working. When I *am* working I do pretty much as I like. Don't let them get too much out of me. I'm up to all the tricks, you know. Suppose a big message comes in. I get wind of it just in time. I'm off to get my supper. Let George do it. The boss knows all about it. It isn't so easy to get men on the Lightning News Agency. We die. We're always dying in our office. Fact. Man fell down dead only three weeks ago. Have another?"

"No, thanks. I suppose that man's place has been filled up by now?"

"No. Not going to be filled up. Chief said he could do with one man less. We have to share his work between us. What do you think of that? Man drops dead, and the Chief saves the salary. Did you think of applying for the job?"

"That was certainly in my mind," said Andrew. "But perhaps I couldn't do the work?"

"Do the work?" Mr. Inchboard gave an ironic laugh and lit another cigarette. "Do the work? A babe in arms could do the work. It doesn't need brains at all. Doesn't need experience. Doesn't need anything but sheer animal labour. Merely copying telegrams on to flimsies. Of course my work is rather responsible. Sometimes I handle things of national importance. But this chap that died—anybody could have done his work. Hard, mind you. Hard, muscular work. Driving through flimsies, eighteen thick. Sometimes twenty-four. How the man kept it up for so many years licks me."

"Are you quite sure that they have decided not to engage anybody in his place?"

"They say they won't, but somebody else may die at any moment. If I were you, I'd keep out of it."

"I must do something. I'm practically down to my last bob. Besides, I want to be a journalist. That's about the only thing I'm suited for. If I don't do that, I shall have to try for an assistant-mastership."

Mr. Inchboard whistled. "Bad as that?"

"Yes. D'you know anything about school-mastering?"

"Yes. They tried me at that, amongst other things. I was fired the first week. A boy wouldn't behave himself at dinner, and I threw a piece of suet pudding at him. Hit the matron in the eye. Most unfortunate occurrence. Matron took it in bad part, and reported me to the Head. Head sent for me. Very much on his dignity. Said I had set a bad example to the boys. Couldn't have the masters throwing suet pudding about. Told me I'd mistaken my vocation. I replied that I'd done nothing of the sort. Told him I never wanted to be a beastly schoolmaster. Told him it was a dog's life. Head nearly had a fit. Apoplectic. Very dangerous. Got quite purple. Rather fascinating to watch. Thought he'd fall down, but he didn't. Gave me a term's salary, and I came to town with it. Who's your agent?"

"Well, I haven't exactly got an agent. I had a row with Plumbridge only yesterday morning. I'm afraid he won't do anything more for me."

"Plumbridge? Biggest bully in the business. Threatened to knock him down one day. Fact. Squared up to him in his own office. Plumbridge

awfully scared. Ran to the bell and rang it. Clerk came in. Saw me dancing round Plumbridge. Fetched two more clerks. I just walked out. Undignified, scrapping with clerks. Walked out. Went round to old McKechnie. Ever heard of him?"

Andrew said that the name seemed vaguely familiar.

"Not his real name. Jew. Charming fellow, all the same. Always gets you a job of some sort. Never asks too many questions. No side. Found me a job at once. Sent me off same night. Little school in Northumberland. Head confirmed drunkard. Had to take entire charge and read prayers. Splendid post. Stayed there the whole term. Never expected to stay a whole term anywhere."

"I shall be awfully glad if you'll give me the address of this man," said Andrew.

Mr. Inchboard called for pencil and paper, and wrote rapidly.

"There you are. McKechnie will jump at you. Doesn't often get an Oxford man and all that. Have a shave first. Put on a clean collar. Crack yourself up. Let me know how you get on. I'll keep your address. Bound to want a man at our place before long. Somebody else sure to die. I'll wire you. Expect a wire at any moment. So long. Glad to have met you."

"I'm awfully glad to have met you. It was very sporting of you to follow me out of the Court and cheer me up. I shan't forget it."

They shook hands.

"That's all right. Enjoyed hearing you talk immensely. There won't be a word of your case in the papers, rely on me."

Mr. Inchboard lighted another cigarette, nodded to Andrew, and strolled away along the grimy street towards the Court-house. Andrew watched the quaint little figure until it disappeared through the huge doorway. Then he returned to Buckingham Street, where he was received with gurgles of joy by the cheerful Jane. Mr. and Mrs. Doubikin were celebrating the event in the kitchen.

On the table in the hall was a letter from Sylvia. Andrew took it with him up to his attic.

"I was awfully glad," she wrote, "to get your last letter, and to hear your really splendid news. Fancy your being an Assistant-Editor already, and with a salary of more than a hundred a year! It is really wonderfully clever of you to have done it, and I can't help boasting a little about you to some of the people round here. You know as well as I do they all had the impression that you were no good, but it has not taken long for you to prove how wrong they were.

"I am sure I should love Mr. Foottit. He must be a very clever man to have discovered your talents so quickly. One of these days, when you come down for a holiday, you must bring him with you. I am not so sure about Mr. Crichton, but bring him as well if you like.

"Your rooms sound delightful. How I should love to take a little peep at you, but that must wait. You are not to do anything rash or impetuous, but just work away as hard as you can and make your position secure. You are so clever, and your heart is so thoroughly in your work, that success is bound to come. It was the beginning that was difficult, wasn't it? But

now all that is over, and you have only to go straight ahead. But don't overdo it, dear. Don't forget that your health is very important. Nothing would be any good without that, and so you are not to work late at night, and you are to get plenty of exercise because you are accustomed to it, and you would miss it very badly.

"Goodbye, dear old boy. Send me the paper every week, but don't trouble to write unless you have plenty of time. You are not to bother about me in the least —only just to think of your career and your health.

"P. S. I have seen the new curate from Eastwood. He is very short, with a pasty face, turned up nose, and sandy hair! So much for the second string to my bow!"

Andrew had not the heart to answer this letter until there was something of a cheerful nature to communicate. Acting on the advice of Mr. Inchboard, he shaved, dressed himself as carefully as possible, and went off to interview Mr. McKechnie.

CHAPTER XIII

YOUNG MR. PETCH DRAWS A PICTURE OF PERFECT BLISS AT FLOODINGTON

MR. McKECHNIE'S office was not nearly such an imposing affair as the offices of Messrs. Plumbridge, Slice & Co. It was on the first floor of a very old-fashioned house in a very old-fashioned street, and consisted of two rooms and a landing. The principal room was occupied by Mr. McKechnie himself; the other room, at the back, was the room in which headmasters inspected the gentlemen provided for that purpose by Mr. McKechnie. The clerk had a table and a chair on the landing, and there were also one or two other chairs to support the languid frames of ushers waiting to be inspected.

Mr. McKechnie's clerk was not at all a suspicious person. On the contrary, he was affability itself, and seemed to have been selected for his stature. He was well over six feet in height, and broad in proportion. He looked something between an ex-prize-fighter and an ex-drill-sergeant. Mr. McKechnie could not have carried on his business at all without the aid of this powerful person, as Andrew had presently to learn.

The clerk received him with a broad smile, and invited him to make himself comfortable on the landing. Mr. McKechnie was engaged at the moment, but he would not be very long. Indeed, the clerk ex-

pected that Mr. McKechnie would be alone at any moment.

Andrew could hear voices—one loud and rasping, and the other a gentle, persuasive, mellow voice with a slightly foreign accent. As he waited, the loud voice became even louder, and suddenly the door of Mr. McKechnie's room opened, and disclosed Mr. McKechnie's visitor and Mr. McKechnie himself. Mr. McKechnie was tall and slender, with rather long iron-grey hair, a prominent nose, and very brilliant eyes. His visitor was a thickset man, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a shiny blue suit and a bowler hat.

"Good-morning," said Mr. McKechnie, affably.

"I tell you," shouted the thickset individual, "that you're a scoundrel! You're a swindler! A rascal! For two pins I'd——!"

"Good-morning," said Mr. McKechnie, still affably.

"For two pins," continued the visitor, "I'd bash your old conk in! Yes, I would, and you jolly well know it! Sending me down to that pigstye of a place, where I wasn't even expected, and making me spend all that money on my fare! D'you suppose I was going to stop in a low-down kennel like that? Why, you ought to be in gaol! That's where you ought to be!"

"Good-morning," said Mr. McKechnie, quite sweetly.

The thickset individual raised his fist. Quick as lightning, Mr. McKechnie made a sign to the clerk. The clerk, who had been on the alert, apparently itching for the call to action, suddenly sprang at the thickset individual, seized him by the nape of the neck, swung him completely round so that he faced towards

the head of the stairs, gave him one shove, and the thickset individual disappeared. There was a slight bend in the stairs, but the thickset individual turned the corner as neatly as though he had been practising the trick for years. Then came the sound of a bump, and all was still.

Mr. McKechnie advanced to the bannisters and looked over. "Good-morning," he said, for the last time, and returned to his office with a pleased smile and a perfectly unruffled demeanour. The clerk, as though nothing at all out of the ordinary had happened, introduced Andrew.

"Certainly, Mr. Dick," replied Mr. McKechnie. "Step in, will you?"

Andrew stepped into the office, and Mr. McKechnie closed the door. His manners were really extremely ingratiating, and Andrew was soon chatting away to him as though they had known each other for years.

"I'm very glad that you came to me," said Mr. McKechnie. "There won't be the slightest difficulty about finding you a post for the autumn, Mr. Dick."

"But what am I to do until the autumn?" asked Andrew, with a very nasty sensation beneath his waistcoat.

"Broke?" suggested Mr. McKechnie with his entrancing smile.

"Pretty nearly."

"Owe a lot of money?"

"Not a farthing."

"Got any people?"

"No."

"Got any money at all?"

"Something less than a pound."

"What are you doing at the present moment, Mr. Dick?"

"Well, I've been trying to make a living as a journalist."

"Very difficult—very difficult indeed. You see, Mr. Dick, there's not much left of the present term. Even if I find you an emergency post for the next week or two, you will still have to face the prospect of the summer holidays. As it happens, there's a gentleman here at the present moment who wants some help during his annual examinations. Would you care to see him? It couldn't do any harm, could it? Yes, why not see him?"

"All right," said Andrew.

"Excuse me just one moment."

Mr. McKechnie opened another door which led to the back-room, passed through it, and closed it carefully behind him. He was absent about two minutes, and then reappeared with an even gayer smile than usual.

"Name of Capstick," he whispered to Andrew. "Keeps a school down Croydon way—day-school. Rather a rum sort of chap—suffers from lumbago. No harm your talking to him."

He led Andrew into the back room. The room was so dark that at first Andrew could not see anybody, but at last he discovered a very stout gentleman endeavouring to rise from an old easy-chair in the corner. Mr. McKechnie rapidly made the necessary introductions, and then left them to it.

"Excuse me," panted Mr. Capstick, "but I can't move about very easily because of me lumbago. 'Ave you ever 'ad lumbago, Mr. Dick?"

"Not yet," said Andrew; "but I daresay I shall in time," he added kindly.

"I sincerely 'ope you won't. It's a nasty thing, is lumbago. Catches you in the back something awful. You wouldn't believe the torture I go through, and then I've got all this worry with the school as well!"

He sank back into the arm-chair, pulled a large red handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his brow. Then he stared at Andrew with round fishy eyes and waited.

"I understand that you require some assistance during your annual examinations?"

"Well, it's like this. At the present moment, I 'aven't got anybody at all, and there's thirty boys, and it's too much for one man to manage the lot, especially when you take into consideration the lumbago. Besides, it don't look well, not 'aving an assistant-master. The boys get wondering about it, and then they talk to their parents, and the parents think I'm doing things on the cheap. Why not come down tomorrow morning and 'ave a look at us, and a bit of dinner? You can get there and back for a shilling, and you'd get your dinner for nothing. What do you say?"

"Supposing that I arranged to help you, Mr. Capstick, when would you require my services, and what would you be prepared to pay me?"

"Well, what I did last year was this: I got a gentleman to come in just for the time, and I gave 'im all his meals and a little instruction in shorthand in return for examining the boys. 'E was a policeman, but 'e wanted to better 'imself, and so the scheme suited us both very well, don't you see? Now I understand from Mr. McKechnie that you've had no

experience as yet in the school-mastering line, so I thought to myself it might suit your book to come down and 'ave a bit of dinner with us, and let the boys see that there's something doing. Just to satisfy them and keep them quiet, and then, if you like our ways, no doubt we could fix up for a week on mutual terms."

Andrew reflected. There was the offer of a week's board and lodging. On the other hand, he would be no better off at the end of the week than he was at the present moment. The very sight of Mr. Capstick was repulsive to him, and he hated the thought of the kind of school that Mr. Capstick probably kept. He was still turning the matter over in his mind when Mr. Capstick leant forward, not without difficulty, and said with a cunning leer:

"There's just one thing you might bear in mind, Mr. Dick. I could write you a splendid testimonial to show to any other master. You wouldn't find me sparing about that. I know just how to pile it on, and I could write you a testimonial that would be worth at least a tenner to you. All signed and dated and correct. Now, what do you say to that?"

This decided the matter. The magistrate had been right—he must be careful in his choice of companions, and he felt quite sure that the magistrate would not have approved of Mr. Capstick.

"Thank you," he said rising, "but I am afraid it will hardly be worth my while. I am very much obliged to you, all the same, and I hope your lumbago will soon be better."

With that he returned to Mr. McKechnie's office.

"Well?" asked the agent. "Have you fixed things up? Are you going to help him?"

"I think not," said Andrew.

"Of course not," replied Mr. McKechnie, promptly. "I knew you wouldn't. I felt sure you wouldn't. You're not the style of man at all for an old beast of that sort. I just wanted to see what you'd say. Now, come along here to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, and I'll see what I can do for you. Don't be down-hearted. We shall soon have you properly fixed up."

Andrew duly returned to Mr. McKechnie's office on the following morning at eleven o'clock, and the morning after that, and the morning after that. On the fifth day, when his capital was reduced to three shillings, Mr. McKechnie received him with an enthusiasm that almost amounted to a boyish glee.

"The very thing at last!" he cried, shaking Andrew warmly by the hand and patting him on the back at the same time. "Nothing could have been better! I've got a man here whose father keeps a day-school at Floodington. You know the type of school—sons of small tradesmen and that sort of thing. The son's been to Oxford, and wants to launch out on his own a bit in a rather better-class way. Going to live at home, you know, and help his father part of the time, and run a little school of his own about a mile off for the sons of gentlefolk. He wants a young man—a University man for choice—to help him with his new venture, and to do a little work for the father as well. I can fix you up if you like. What's the lowest you'll take? He can't afford to pay much, you know, just at first."

"What do you think I ought to ask?"

"Ask fifty. He'll offer thirty. Then we'll split the difference and take forty. Oh, the father wants good French. Is your French good?"

"Rotten," said Andrew.

"Never mind. I shall tell him we can offer good French."

"But I know hardly any French at all," protested Andrew. "They don't teach French at Oxford. I haven't opened a French book since I left school, and there we only did it in the lower forms, and in a desultory kind of way."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. McKechnie. "Everybody wants French, but the public schools and the universities don't teach it. Why? Too proud? Too insular? I give it up. Now I'll let you into a little professional secret. Did you see that young fellow out there on the landing—little black moustache, black hair cut very short, clothes that don't fit him, general air of apology for being alive?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"What did he look like to you?"

"To tell the truth, he looked like a waiter out for the day."

"That's exactly what he is," said Mr. McKechnie, smiling happily. "He's a waiter in a small French restaurant where I sometimes go for my lunch. One day I began chatting to him, and discovered that he was sick of being a waiter. He wanted to get on in the world—in other words, he was willing to take less money if he could live a more gentlemanly life. And then it suddenly occurred to me—why shouldn't I get him a job as French master in a school? Who's

to know that he's ever been a waiter? I got a testimonial from his parish priest at home, and told him to buy a tweed suit, and there he is! I shall get him twenty pounds a year to start with, and everything found. That's what we have to do because your public schools and universities won't condescend to teach men French. All the same, you'll have to promise good French if you want to get this job with Mr. Petch at Floodington."

"What's the good of that? They'd find me out the first day."

"Not at all, my dear boy. All you have to do is to keep one lesson ahead of your class the whole time. Learn up the stuff overnight, and teach it to 'em the next day. That's the way. Lots of men do that. Now I'll just speak to young Mr. Petch."

He dived into the inner room, and dived out again; dived in again with Andrew at his heels, and dived out again leaving Andrew and young Mr. Petch together.

Young Mr. Petch greeted Andrew with a cordial smile and an outstretched hand. His manner was really quite engaging. He was a little fellow, with fair hair and blue eyes, and gave Andrew the impression of overweening modesty. Young Mr. Petch, by his general demeanour, conveyed the idea that he considered it rather an impertinence on his part to assume the rôle of an employer, and he combined with that attitude a general air of deprecating jollity, as who should say, "Here's a lark! Here are you and I, both jolly good sports, not caring a hang for anything serious, arranging to run a school of our own, and have a ripping time doing it! What a spree! We shall never stop laughing!"

This was exactly the sort of suggestion calculated to appeal to Andrew. He was getting so very tired of living in an utterly strange world, and meeting people who knew nothing whatever of his world, and had not an idea in common with him, that he was almost ready to embrace young Mr. Petch because he was an Oxford man, and knew Andrew's type, and the kind of life to which Andrew had been accustomed. He could not quite picture Mr. Petch in the typical undergraduate's room, peopled with typical undergraduates, but there were all sorts at Oxford, and Mr. Petch could not very well have spent three years there without learning to look at the world, now and again, through Oxford glasses.

They exchanged the usual data as to names of colleges, and the years when they went up and came down, and then young Mr. Petch drew a little nearer to business.

"This new school," he said, "is going to be quite my own little affair. It will all be great fun. You and I would run it together. We shouldn't have very much to do with my pater's school. I have already booked about a dozen pupils—all decent little chaps, the sons of rich people. You see, as they all live at home, the work is over about four o'clock in the afternoon, and then you would be free to read, or write, or go to the theatre, or do anything you liked. If you are fond of the theatre, we get the best of everything at Floodington, as you probably know. I think Mr. McKechnie mentioned that you were fond of writing. Well, it so happens that there is a little sitting-room in our house which nobody uses. You could make it your own den, and then nobody would

bother you at all, and you could have all your evenings for writing."

"It sounds just the very thing," said Andrew, and he meant it. He was really taking quite a fancy to young Mr. Petch, and young Mr. Petch, noting that fact, mentally knocked another ten pounds a year off Andrew's salary.

"Well," said young Mr. Petch, "I don't mind telling you quite frankly, Mr. Dick, that I like you, and I think we should get on famously together. I am sure we should have no end of a time. The only thing is about this beastly question of salary. I hate mentioning it, but it's got to be done. You must bear in mind that my school is still in its infancy." (He might have added, with equal truth, that it was an infants' school.) "If it succeeds, and you care to stay with me, of course I should be delighted to increase your salary in proportion. In the meantime, what is the very least that you would come for, Mr. Dick?"

"Well," replied Andrew, "I thought fifty pounds a year would be somewhere near the mark."

Young Mr. Petch looked quite shocked. "Fifty pounds a year!" he exclaimed. "Why, I've been working for my pater for five years, and he doesn't pay me fifty pounds a year even now. Of course he has to keep me, just as he would have to keep you, and I reckon that as being worth a hundred a year."

"What salary had you got in your mind?" asked Andrew.

"To be quite frank," said young Mr. Petch, "my pater told me to offer mutual terms, which means, of course, that you give your services in exchange for

your board and lodging. But I don't expect to get an Oxford man on mutual terms; that would be ridiculous!" Here Mr. Petch laughed heartily. "Oh, yes, that would be too ridiculous. A man must have some pocket-money if he is going to have a good time at Floodington. You can't go to theatres without spending money. Now, suppose we say twenty pounds a year to begin with? How would that suit you? Bear in mind, please, that the school is only in its infancy."

A bright idea occurred to Andrew. What was Mr. McKechnie doing all this time? Why should that man of genius languish alone in the next room? If Mr. McKechnie was going to draw a commission, why should he not work for it? After all, the greater the amount that could be extracted from Mr. Petch, the higher would be Mr. McKechnie's commission.

"If you will excuse me a moment," he said, "I should just like to speak to Mr. McKechnie."

"Certainly," said young Mr. Petch. "By all means."

Andrew returned to the office, and began to tell Mr. McKechnie what had passed, but the latter quickly stopped him.

"I know! Matter of money. Leave it to me!"

And with that he dived into the inner room, and was gone about two minutes. Then he returned, ushering in young Mr. Petch, who again shook Andrew by the hand, and told him that he should look forward with eagerness to the twentieth of September, when the fun would begin in real earnest. Evidently, it was all arranged.

As soon as young Mr. Petch had gone, Mr. McKechnie told Andrew that he had fixed him up at the rate

of ten pounds for the term, with full board and lodging, and the use of the private sitting-room in the evenings. The agent's fee would be two guineas, so that Andrew would have nearly eight pounds to squander on riotous living in the gay northern city of Floodington. In the meantime, he had to keep himself somewhere and somehow for nearly two months.

As he passed out of Mr. McKechnie's office, the stalwart clerk drew himself to his full height, put his heels together, and gravely saluted. Obviously, this handsome leave-taking could not be repaid with less than a shilling.

Slowly and thoughtfully, Andrew descended the stairs, turning a two-shilling piece over and over in his pocket as he went. He was not much better at arithmetic than at French, but sixty days on two shillings seemed to work out at something less than a halfpenny a day.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

DEPICTS ANDREW IN THE BOSOM OF THE PETCH FAMILY

IT was a pale, attenuated, very much older and wiser Andrew who walked up to the booking-office at Euston on the morning of the twentieth of September, valise in hand, and bought himself a third-class single ticket to Floodington. He knew to a halfpenny what the ticket was going to cost him, and he had the exact amount ready in his hand. If a shilling had slipped through a hole in his pocket on the way to the station, he would not have been able to keep faith with Mr. Petch; he had run things as fine as that.

It may be urged by those who have wisdom in such matters that he could have walked into the nearest pawnbroker's, opened his valise, and raised a sovereign or so without much difficulty on one of his spare suits. But Andrew knew more about the interior of that valise than anybody else—except, perhaps, Mrs. Doubikin. Mrs. Doubikin, indeed, had continued to do her duty by Mr. Doubikin so thoroughly that that gentleman was by this time pretty well equipped for a trip to Monte Carlo or a tour round the world. During the last two months he had acquired, with the help of his faithful wife, a very nice leather trunk, a solid leather suit-case, a leather hat-box containing

a nearly new top-hat, a morning coat and vest, with fancy trouserings all complete, two lounge suits, a dress suit, half-a-dozen dress shirts, three pairs of boots in good repair, a gold-mounted walking-stick, a watch and chain, and a large assortment of silk ties.

In return for these much-disparaged articles, Mrs. Doubikin, out of the kindness of her maternal heart, had allowed Andrew to go on sleeping in the attic on the fourth floor, and had provided him with breakfast each morning. The shilling breakfast always seemed to Andrew a horrible extravagance, but it was, as we have seen, part and parcel of the contract with Mrs. Doubikin, and so he was obliged to take it. But he had grown cunning in the matter. He had discovered that by coming down rather late he had the breakfast-room to himself. Mrs. Doubikin was not the person to leave a loaf standing unprotected on the table, or even a pat of butter. Andrew's breakfast was duly served out to him, and the rest of the table was bare of everything save cups and saucers, plates and dishes, knives and forks, which had been used by the other lodgers. Andrew, therefore, robbed nobody but himself when he adroitly slipped half his breakfast each morning into an envelope, and smuggled it upstairs to his attic for consumption later in the day—say about supper-time. In this way, he managed to provide himself with his two chief meals each day. For the third meal, he relied, of course, on his old friend the penny piece of lunch-cake. A somewhat meagre diet, indeed, for a young man of his years, who had been accustomed all his life to a generous supply of good food, but he was not taking very much exercise this summer, and so he managed to pull through.

Two strokes of luck had come his way. He had sold a personal paragraph concerning some Oxford celebrity, who had sprained his ankle in the Alps, to the "Evening Planet," and had received, on calling at the office and requesting payment, the sum of half-a-crown. Thus encouraged, he had bombarded the "Evening Planet" with personal paragraphs about everybody in Oxford, great or small, but, unfortunately for Andrew, these dignitaries steadily refused to sprain their ankles in the Alps, and so the Editor of the "Evening Planet" took no interest in them. Andrew's half-crown went in stationery—not in stamps, because he used to walk to the office with his paragraphs and drop them into the box.

The other stroke of luck was a real stroke of luck. One afternoon he had met Mr. Inchboard in the Strand, and had told him of his success with Mr. McKechnie, and his destination on the twentieth of September.

"Doing anything in the meantime?" asked Inchboard.

"Not very much."

"Well, take this card." He pulled a soiled visiting-card out of his waistcoat pocket and scribbled on it, using Andrew's back as a writing-desk to the inconvenience and annoyance of various pedestrians. "That's the address. Bound and Micklethwaite. Quite decent chaps. Starting a weekly paper. 'The Rag-Bag.' Not much money. Plenty of push. Experienced. Printers standing in. Tell 'em you can write anything. Have a drink?"

"No, thanks, I don't think I will. Could I go round there now?"

"Certainly. Off you pop. Plenty of cheek. Don't tell 'em you're a new hand. Offer to interview somebody. Smile. Be gay. Dash. Dash in and dash out. Be in a hurry. Full of work. Name your price. Guinea a column. Take ten bob. Off with you. Good luck."

Andrew had thereupon gone straight away to the offices of "The Rag-Bag," and, by virtue of Mr. Inchboard's card, secured an interview with Messrs. Bound and Micklethwaite. Bound was a thin young man of medium height, with a great deal of fair, wavy hair, and a certain ironic humour. Micklethwaite was a tall, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, blue-eyed person, who looked as though he knew nothing whatever about journalism, but had been at the game since the age of fifteen. Bound did most of the talking; Micklethwaite seemed rather bored until it came to the question of price, and then he suddenly woke up.

"Yes," said Mr. Bound. "There's plenty of scope for smart writing on this paper. We're going to make 'The Rag-Bag' the cleverest and brightest weekly paper in the kingdom. We don't want to write it all ourselves; in fact, we haven't the time to write it all ourselves. If you can make good with us, Mr. Dick, there's no reason why you shouldn't draw quite a nice little income out of this paper."

Andrew's tired heart was still capable of something faintly resembling a leap. The faithful servant gave that little imitation now. If he could earn even one pound a week out of 'The Rag-Bag,' he might not have to go to Floodington after all. Despite young Mr. Petch's assurances, he had never been able to persuade himself that Floodington was going to be

such extremely jolly fun. He had misgivings about Floodington.

"I can write anything you like," he said, bearing in mind Mr. Inchboard's excellent advice. "Just give me a hint as to the kind of thing and the length, and I'll let you have it in the morning."

"Well," replied Mr. Bound, "I don't as a rule believe in feeding contributors with ideas; we expect our contributors to feed us. But I'll give you one idea that may be useful. There's an exceedingly funny chap performing just now at the Roundabout. He comes on as a tramp, and rides round the stage on a bicycle, and keeps falling off. Every time he falls off he pulls off a collar, and has another clean collar underneath. Then he takes a little brush out of his pocket and dusts himself down. It's the funniest turn I've ever seen. Now, if you can get hold of that chap, and have a talk with him, and find out exactly what he's like in private life, and how he got the idea of doing this turn, and all that sort of thing, we could use it in our first number."

"Right you are. By the way, what do you pay per column?"

"You can safely leave that to us," put in Mr. Micklethwaite. "You bring us a good story, and you won't find us mean."

"All right," said Andrew, and he shot out of the office as though he had appointments with every Editor in Fleet Street.

That night he spent three hours with the comedian at the Roundabout—two hours and forty minutes in the dressing-room, and twenty minutes on the stage. The comedian was a helpful fellow, and Andrew

returned to Buckingham Street full of copy. He wrote the interview that night before going to bed, and took it down to the offices of "The Rag-Bag" next morning.

Mr. Bound read it through, and tossed it across to Mr. Micklethwaite. Mr. Micklethwaite read it through, looked at Mr. Bound, and then rang a bell. The bell was answered by a small boy.

"Take that round to the printer," said Mr. Micklethwaite, "and tell him to get it into type as soon as possible. . . . You've got just the touch we want, Mr. Dick. It might be worth your while to call in here every day and submit a list of ideas."

"Good ideas," added Mr. Bound.

Andrew walked away on feet that were really light this time. Nothing quite so quick had ever happened to him before. In less than twenty-four hours he had made the acquaintance of these two young Editors, he had spent a whole evening in the company of the most successful music-hall comedian of the day, had written an interview which would run to about two and a half columns, had got it accepted, had seen it sent to the printer, and had been told to call at the office every day with ideas. If that did not mean success, then he would despair of conquering Fleet Street.

When he called next day, Messrs. Bound and Micklethwaite were quite cordial, but they did not care for any of his ideas. When he called the next day, they were not quite so cordial, nor were they more impressed by any of his ideas. This went on for about a fortnight. In the meantime, the first number of "The Rag-Bag" had appeared, and Andrew's interview had nearly a page to itself. He learnt from Mr. Micklethwaite that payments for editorial matter

were made monthly, and he thought it better not to ask for cash payment. For some unexplained reason, Messrs. Bound and Micklethwaite lost interest in him from this moment, and the day came when they were too busy to see him at all. In point of fact, the article in the first number was his sole contribution to "The Rag-Bag." He received twenty-five shillings for it, but that was not until he had left London and journeyed up to the gay northern city of Floodington.

Rain was falling steadily when Andrew reached Floodington. Young Mr. Petch had expressed in a letter the fervent hope that he would be able to meet Andrew at the station, but this passionate desire had evidently been frustrated. After making several inquiries about trams, and receiving brusque replies in an accent that was strongly reminiscent of young Mr. Petch, Andrew at last found himself set down in front of a largish house of dark colour standing a few yards back from the road. Houses of precisely similar size and design flanked the educational emporium of the elder Mr. Petch. A few sooty bushes were leading a joyless existence in a small patch of ground that would probably have been described in an auctioneer's catalogue as the front garden.

Andrew climbed the steps and rang the bell. The door was opened by a young woman who wore an apron but no cap. She was quite a good-looking young woman, and the twinkle in her eye somewhat reassured Andrew. It was evident that a sense of the humour of things could survive even in so black and busy a city as Floodington.

"Please step in," said the young woman. "It's Mr. Dick, isn't it?"

Andrew bowed, smiled, and stepped in.

"I'll tell my brother you've arrived. He's upstairs, shaving. He spends most of his spare time shaving, but for mercy's sake don't tell him I said so."

She conducted Andrew into a sort of living-room, and bade him be seated. There were two children in this room, a boy and a girl. The boy was a little sturdy fellow, a small copy of young Mr. Petch. He had very bright eyes, and a very inquisitive, not to say cheeky, manner. His name was Edgar, and he answered to the euphonious contraction of Eddie. The girl was two or three years younger, and also had bright eyes and an inquisitive, not to say cheeky, manner. They stared at Andrew for nearly a minute in silence. Then the little girl giggled, whereupon Eddie dealt her a sharp blow with his fist. This was promptly returned by Miss Bessie, and the young people were soon engaged in the pleasant recreation of punching, scratching, and hair pulling, eventually falling to the floor and continuing the game with zest under the table.

Suddenly there came a footstep in the hall, and at that sound the combat immediately ceased, the children picked themselves up, seized each a book, and were busily reading when young Mr. Petch, known to the domestic circle as Herbert, entered the room. It was clear to Andrew that Herbert Petch held a position of authority over his brothers and sisters.

"Hullo," said Herbert, seizing Andrew's hand, and giving it a hearty northern grip. "Sorry I couldn't get down to the station, old fellow, but I was delayed

at the last moment. Come upstairs and I'll show you our room."

Andrew followed him upstairs, wondering whether he had been mistaken, or whether Mr. Herbert Petch had really made use of the expression, "our room." When they reached the first-floor landing, Herbert went on tiptoe past a certain door, and indicated to Andrew, by laying his finger upon his lips, the necessity for silence.

"That's my father's room," he explained, as they climbed to the second floor. "He can't stand any noise. You must be very careful about that."

They climbed higher and higher, and at last reached the top of the house. Herbert Petch led the way into a fairly large room. The place of honour in this room was occupied by a double bed of considerable size. Andrew wondered, for a single horrible instant, whether he was expected to sleep with young Mr. Petch. But then he caught sight of a small camp bed in the corner, and told himself that he had wronged the good Herbert. It was true that Herbert was a quite small man, whereas he, Andrew, was a tall man; still, it was decidedly unselfish of Herbert to condemn himself, for a long term of fifteen weeks, to a camp-bed in the corner of the room.

"This is our room," said Herbert. "Nice room, isn't it?"

"Very nice," Andrew agreed.

"That's your bed," said Herbert, pointing to the camp-bed in the corner. "And this," he continued cheerfully, pointing to the large bed in the centre, "is mine."

"I see," said Andrew, much too taken aback by the

colossal impudence of the arrangement to make any protest.

"I'm rather particular about my possessions," explained Herbert, "so we may as well have a clear understanding from the outset. I'll use the dressing-table, because I must have a good place for shaving, and I'll get them to put a little glass for you over the mantelpiece. I don't suppose you have to shave as much as I do, so you can easily manage without a dressing-table. Now about your things. I see that you've only brought one suit-case. Is your other luggage being sent on?"

"Yes," lied Andrew. "I'm having it forwarded from town by direct delivery. I hope it won't go wrong."

"I hope so, too," said Herbert Petch, regarding Andrew searchingly. "You were very nicely dressed when I saw you in London; that was one of the reasons why I made up my mind to engage you. In a school of the character that I am starting, it is very important that the masters should be well-dressed."

"Yes," agreed Andrew, eyeing young Mr. Petch's equipment of reach-me-downs. "I can quite understand that."

"Well," continued the bright and breezy Herbert, "of course there is no room in the wardrobe because I've got such an awful lot of things, but I've cleared the two pegs behind the door for you, and the bottom drawer in that chest of drawers. And now we may as well go down and have some tea. I'll send young Eddie up with your bag."

They descended to the living-room, again passing the mysterious door on the first floor on tiptoe. The

living-room was now fairly full of people. At one end of the table sat Mrs. Petch, a motherly soul, with an open, pleasant countenance. On either side of her sat Bessie and Eddie. Next to Bessie came Pattie, the girl with the twinkling eyes who had opened the door to Andrew. The chair next to Pattie was vacant, and Andrew presently found himself seated in it. Mr. Herbert Petch took the end of the table facing his mother. On his right was Mr. Springbelt, the other assistant-master. Next to Mr. Springbelt was Charlie Petch, a fleshy, fair-haired youth of about twenty, and between Charlie and Eddie sat Lucy, a girl of about eighteen, with a somewhat superior manner due to the fact that she had once been called the beauty of the family, and was taking lessons in drawing and water-colour painting at the Floodington Technical Institute.

Andrew had now plenty of opportunity for cultivating his gift of observation. The whole atmosphere of the house, the types around him, the method of conducting the meal—everything was almost as strange to him as though he had been suddenly planted down in a foreign country. Two large plates of thick bread-and-butter occupied the centre of the table. There were no additions of any sort to the meal, save that one boiled egg was presently brought in from the kitchen by Pattie and placed in front of Mr. Herbert Petch. This mark of favour, Andrew learned later, was due to the fact that Mr. Herbert Petch was reading for Ordination, and had to keep up his strength. The rest of the party contented themselves with the thick bread-and-butter, whilst cups of tea were poured out by Mrs. Petch, and passed from hand to hand around the table.

Andrew was acutely conscious of three things. The first was the extraordinary terrorism exercised by Herbert Petch over the whole party; the second was a stream of furtive glances that kept coming his way from Miss Lucy's side of the table; and the third was the very peculiar manner of Mr. Springbelt.

This unfortunate gentleman was extremely thin, very nearly bald, and so nervous that every movement resolved itself into a kind of spasmodic twitch. Andrew found himself gazing at Mr. Springbelt as one fascinated. If Mr. Springbelt wished to raise his cup, he performed the act in a series of twitches that threatened to send the tea flying in all directions. If he wished to bite a piece of bread-and-butter, it cost him quite four distinct movements to get the bread-and-butter up to his mouth. If he wished to make an observation, then the twitches became fast and furious. Every muscle in his body seemed to be set a-twitching; his eyes twitched, and his head twitched, and his mouth twitched, and his shoulders twitched, his elbows wagged to and fro like the wings of a frightened duck, and one could hear his knees and his feet knocking together under the table.

The Petch family seemed to think nothing at all of this extraordinary performance. They went on with their tea as though it was the most natural thing in the world for a human being to be twitching himself to bits before their very eyes. Mr. Springbelt had another peculiarity. It seemed utterly impossible for him to look anybody straight in the face. He would half cock his head in the direction of the person addressed, shoot one fishy eyeball at them from the extreme corner of the socket, and then rapidly twitch

it away again, finally addressing the remark to the table-cloth. Add to these individualisms a voice of practically unlimited register, but utterly beyond control, so that even a very short sentence resolved itself into a sort of chromatic scale, and it is obvious that the senior assistant-master of Mr. Petch's educational emporium constituted in himself a standing advertisement for the school.

The conversation at tea-time, except for Mr. Springbelt's occasional interruptions, was carried on entirely by Herbert Petch and Andrew. Herbert Petch was saving time by running through the programme for next day and practically every day.

"We get up at half-past seven," he explained, "and breakfast is at eight. At a quarter to nine the boys begin to arrive, and Mr. Petch would like you to be in the playground with them to see that they don't fight or break any windows. If the weather is cold, Mr. Springbelt generally organises a jolly game of 'Prisoner's Base,' don't you, Mr. Springbelt?"

Mr. Springbelt, in the course of the next minute or two, contrived to say that he did. Then, quite overcome by the exertion of this effort, he subsided into his chair again, and went on juggling with the tea and bread-and-butter.

"At nine o'clock," continued Herbert Petch, "my father comes downstairs, and all the boys must be in their places ready for prayers. After prayers, the names are called over, and any boys who have misbehaved themselves on the previous day are caned. Then school begins in real earnest. You will take a Scripture class until ten o'clock. You must be very careful to avoid the New Testament because at least half of

our pupils are members of Jewish families. At ten o'clock you will walk up the road to my school, which is about a mile away. You ought to be there at a quarter past ten sharp. You will then take the lower form in reading or writing until eleven o'clock. At eleven o'clock you will take all the boys from my school to a piece of waste ground near by, and keep them happy and amused until half-past eleven. I should like you to think out some nice games suitable for little boys of about seven years of age. As this is the hour when parents are likely to be about, I hope you will be at your gayest and jolliest with the little lads.

"At half-past eleven you bring the boys back to the schoolroom, and take the lower form again until a quarter past twelve. The boys then go home to their dinner, and I am sure you will not mind taking charge of any who happen to be going your way if their nurses cannot come for them. We have dinner here at a quarter to one; that is the principal meal of the day, so we all make the most of it, don't we, Mr. Springbelt?"

Mr. Springbelt, recognising this as a joke, made a horrible attempt to laugh, which brought out beads of perspiration on his abnormally high forehead. After that he poured a little tea down the front of his waistcoat, and seemed much refreshed.

"School begins again," went on Herbert Petch, who seemed to take a kind of fiendish glee in detailing the duties that would fall to the new usher, "at two o'clock. As I shall not require your services at my school in the afternoon, you will remain here and assist my father. On two afternoons a week he wishes

you to deliver a lecture to the greater part of the school on English History. On another afternoon you will lecture on Geography. On a fourth afternoon Mr. Springbelt lectures on Chemistry, with practical experiments. As the boys are apt to become rather excited over this lecture, you will remain in the room and keep strict order.

"School ends at half-past four each afternoon, and you will then, as long as the days are light enough, accompany the boys to the football field, and join with them in a rattling good game. After that comes tea, and the remainder of the day will be your own. We take supper in this room at eight-thirty, after which either my father or I read prayers, and then we go to bed. Now, if you are ready, I will show you your little sitting-room. You have prepared the little sitting-room upstairs for Mr. Dick, have you not, Pattie?"

"Yes, Herbert," said Pattie meekly.

"Then come along, Mr. Dick."

He led the way upstairs once again, and opened a door facing the head of the stairs. Andrew had not expected a spacious apartment, but he could not help being surprised at the smallness of the room now shown to him by the young Mr. Petch. It was so small that it was difficult for them both to stand in it at the same time. Some extremely adroit person had managed to get a chair into it, and a tiny table, but that was all the furniture it could hold. Still, it was better than no room at all, and he already looked forward eagerly to the hours that he would spend there with his pens, ink, and paper.

CHAPTER II

YOUNG MR. PETCH, HAVING OFFERED UP PRAYER, GETS INTO BED WITH HIS CLOTHES ON

AT about seven o'clock that same evening, young Mr. Petch having decided to do an hour's reading before dinner, Andrew was free to retire to his little den to write to Sylvia.

"I warned you," he wrote, "that I should be making a change in my address, but I think you will be surprised to find that I have left London altogether for the time being. I may as well make a clean breast of it, and confess that London was a little too much for me. My berth on the 'Straight Tip' only lasted about forty-eight hours or so. I never received a single halfpenny in salary, and Mr. Foottit, who turned out to be a thorough rascal, did me out of ten pounds into the bargain. I had a little success with a new paper called 'The Rag-Bag,' and they printed an interview I wrote for their first number, but I have not yet been paid for it. Of course, I shall be paid for it, but I do wish Editors would be a little more prompt in these matters. It is all very well for the chaps who have got a good connection, and money coming in all the time, but when you are beginning it makes it quite impossible if you have to wait for the cheques. If I had only had a little more capital, I feel sure that I could have hung on, and got my footing; however, it's no

use talking about that now. Some day I may go back and have another shot; in the meantime, I have taken a post as assistant-master in this school, and here I shall be till Christmas.

"It is not a very swagger sort of school, and my salary is not exactly enormous, but it means board and lodging, and I shall have time in the evenings to write my articles and stories, so that, on the whole, the arrangement is not a bad one. I hope you won't be too ashamed of me for having failed in my first attack on London. Some day I will give you all the details, and you will see that I was up against a pretty stiff job. I am not going to make excuses for myself; I suppose there is something in me which makes for failure.

"Write me a letter as soon as you can, and tell me all the news. By the way, as there is not much chance of my wanting my bat or my racquet for some little time to come perhaps you would not mind selling them to Harris for anything that he will give. I don't suppose it will be much, but a little pocket-money would be rather handy. This seems to spell failure in rather large letters, but I am quite cheery, and you are not to imagine anything else.

"All my love."

He laid down his pen, and gazed through the window of the tiny apartment into Bayfield Road. The evening shadows were settling down on Floodington, and they added a melancholy to the scene which it certainly did not need. A tram-car, loaded with tired workers, rumbled by. The rain was still falling.

There was no fire in Andrew's apartment, and no pictures—nothing but the table and the chair.

He sat for some minutes leaning his head on his hand and wondering how he would ever get through the long fifteen weeks that stretched in front of him. And when he had got through them, what next? Why, he could only look forward to another term either in this school or elsewhere. And so the vista of years opened before him, each one as grey and dull as its predecessor, for youth sets no limits either to Hope or Despair. Andrew, in that hour, was nearer to despair than he had ever been in his short life.

Suddenly the door opened without warning, and Lucy Petch entered. She was carrying a small picture in her hands, and gave quite a genuine start of surprise when she saw Andrew sitting at the little table.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Dick. I didn't know you were here."

Andrew rose, and this brought them very near together.

"Not at all," was all he could think of to say.

"I thought your room might be a little bare," Lucy explained, "so I was going to put this picture somewhere for you."

"May I look at it?"

"Yes, if you won't be too critical."

"Why? Did you do it yourself?"

"Yes, I did it at the Technical Institute. I'm studying there, you know."

"I think it's very pretty."

"Do you really?" Lucy flushed with pleasure. "My brothers are always so horrid to me about my drawing

and painting, but brothers are always like that, aren't they?"

"I don't know," said Andrew. "I never had a brother."

"But aren't you a brother yourself? I mean, haven't you got a sister?"

"I haven't got anybody in the world. At least, not any relative."

Lucy's sharp eyes had espied the letter lying on the table.

"Are you sure there is nobody in the world that matters to you?"

"Oh," said Andrew, noticing the direction of her glance, "that's different. That's to an old friend."

"A man-friend?"

"Well, no, not exactly a man-friend."

"What do you mean by 'not exactly'? You can't be writing to a dog, you know."

"No, I'm not writing to a dog. I'm writing to an old friend who happens to be a girl."

"Oh." Lucy put on a coquettish air. "On second thoughts, I don't think you'd better have my picture in your room."

"Oh, please don't say that. Why shouldn't I have it? It's such a rotten little room!"

"Yes, it is, isn't it? I'm afraid you won't like it very much, living with us."

"Why not?"

"Well, I shouldn't think we could be a very nice family to live with. We're all rather beasts."

"All?" replied Andrew, giving the door a tiny little push behind Lucy's back.

"You mustn't do that," said Lucy.

"Do what?"

"Shut the door when I'm in here with you."

"I didn't shut it. I only gave it a little push."

"Well, you mustn't even give it a little push. It must stand wide open."

"Why must it?"

"You know very well why."

"No, I don't. Won't you tell me?"

"Well, because the room isn't very big, is it?"

"It's quite big enough for you and me."

Their eyes met. Lucy immediately looked down, backed away as far as possible, and laid her hand on the handle of the door.

"Now I must go," she said.

"Wait a moment," begged Andrew. "There was something I was going to say."

"Won't it keep?"

"No, it won't keep."

"Be quick, then."

"I was going to say I'm quite sure you're not all beasts."

"How do you know? You don't know anything about us yet."

"Oh, yes, I do. Anyhow, I know you're not a beast."

"How do you know?"

"Because you brought me up that jolly little picture."

"I'm not going to leave it, all the same."

"Do!"

"No. If Herbert saw it—and of course he'd be bound to see it if you put it up on the wall—he'd be

simply furious, and then the others would get to know all about it, and they'd make my life unbearable."

"Then why did you bring it up at all?"

"I don't know. It was a silly thing to do, but girls do silly things, you know. Goodbye."

Before Andrew knew it, she had whisked herself out of the little room, painting and all, and he was once more alone. But the mood of melancholy had passed. Life at Floodington was not going to be such a dull affair after all. He found himself almost looking forward to supper-time. The letter to Sylvia reproached him a little, so he folded it up, put it into an envelope, went down the road to the nearest pillar-box, dropped it in, and then returned to the bright eyes and coquettish glances of Miss Lucy Petch.

Supper was almost an exact repetition of tea. They all sat in the same places, two plates of thick bread-and-butter again monopolised the centre of the table, Mr. Springbelt went on twitching, Herbert Petch did nearly all the talking, Lucy shot sly and provocative glances at Andrew. Save for the fact that nobody had an egg, not even the great Herbert, and that water took the place of tea, the meal might have been the same as the one they had so rapturously enjoyed three or four hours ago.

Andrew had discovered, somewhat to his surprise, that there were no servants in this house. At least, that was how he put it to himself, but he was not quite correct. Mrs. Petch was the cook, Miss Pattie Petch was the general, Lucy was the light parlour-maid, and Bessie was the "tweenie." It rather startled him, coming downstairs one morning, to find Miss Pattie Petch on her hands and knees washing the hall,

but he soon grew accustomed to this phenomenon, and found that such an arrangement was quite usual, though not invariable, in that part of the world.

Supper over, Herbert Petch read prayers. He began with a long piece out of the Bible, which he read with extreme unction, managing to convey the feeling to his hearers that the reader was a highly virtuous and altogether superior kind of person, whilst they themselves had been spending a shockingly wicked day of it, and might only hope to escape destruction during the night by the personal intervention with the Deity of Herbert Petch.

Then they all knelt down, turning their faces to the wall and mercilessly exposing the soles of their boots and shoes to the immaculate Herbert, who remained in the centre. He now read a number of prayers from the Prayer Book, but, not content with that, concluded with an improvisation of his own. In this he explained to the Deity that another term had that day opened at Bayfield College, and asked that the labours of all those present might result in the moral and intellectual development of those entrusted to their care, together with a slight hint that an increase in the number of pupils after Christmas would not be unworthy the deserts of either Mr. Petch senior or Mr. Petch junior. He went on to call the attention of the Deity to the fact that a branch establishment of Bayfield College had opened higher up the road, and asked that the same blessing might rest on the humble efforts of those who would be working at the branch establishment, if not, perhaps, just a shade more than was usually bestowed upon Bayfield College. In conclusion, to Andrew's horror, he men-

tioned that there was a new-comer in their midst that night, who, though young and inexperienced, would be well looked after, and thus prevented from doing such damage to the souls of those with whom he was being brought in contact as might otherwise have been the case.

This earnest exhortation was followed by a long interval of silent prayer. Then they all rose, looking as impressed as they could contrive, and Mr. Springbelt dashed at Mrs. Petch as though he were going to knock her through the wall into the next house. But he only shook hands with the lady, though this must have been sufficiently painful, seeing that in his agitation he grasped two only of her fingers, one of them being doubled up at the time. Mr. Springbelt repeated this operation on everybody in the room, and then twitched himself backwards into the hall, and disappeared.

All the Petch family now began to indulge in an orgy of goodnight kissing. Everybody kissed everybody else, the monotony of the performance being varied only by Master Eddie, who managed to bite the ear of his dear little sister Bessie under pretence of wishing her a brotherly goodnight. Bessie uttered a slight scream, which necessitated an explanation of the whole affair to brother Herbert, who became filled with righteous indignation, and promised that a full report of the incident should be laid before his father the following morning. Under cover of this episode, Andrew slipped up to his room.

He had not been in bed many minutes when Herbert Petch arrived. If there is one thing the young Englishman learns at the Public Schools and the Uni-

versities, that thing is undoubtedly cleanliness of person. Imagine Andrew's horror, therefore, when Mr. Herbert Petch, the immaculate, the unfleshly, the personal friend of the Deity, actually got into bed without removing his undervest and other undergarments. Even Mr. Herbert Petch seemed to feel that some explanation of this conduct was necessary.

"Rather good plan, this," he said. "Ever try it?"

"No," said Andrew, shortly.

"Oh, you should. Saves time at night and saves time in the morning. Of course one has to change a little oftener."

It certainly did save time in the morning, for Mr. Herbert Petch lay in bed until the last possible moment, and then sprang up, hurriedly pulled on his outer clothing, rinsed his face slightly in half a pint of water, and hurried downstairs to thank the Deity, on his own behalf and that of his unworthy family and the other members of the household, for an excellent night's rest.

However, this last illuminating flash was spared Andrew for the time being. We leave him in his little camp-bed in the corner, trying to prevent his toes from peeping out at the end and his knees from scraping against the iron framework, listening to the unctuous snores of Mr. Herbert Petch, trying to keep his mind fixed on Sylvia, but continually finding that it would wander off to the quick covert glances of little Miss Lucy.

So ended the first day in Bayfield College.

CHAPTER III

ANDREW AS USHER. MINUTE ACCOUNT OF A VERY NERVOUS DAY

ANDREW was late for breakfast next morning, having wasted about ten minutes in a search for the bathroom. He discovered it at last, only to find that it was in use—not as a bathroom, but as a bedroom for Charlie Petch. It was one of the grievances of Charlie's existence that he could not get to bed on Saturday nights until all the household had bathed. This shortage of rooms in a house of fair size was due to the fact that two of the principal apartments were occupied by a wealthy Greek gentleman, who had nothing whatever to do with the school, but was a boarder in Mr. Petch's house, thus adding a pleasant variety to the labours of Mrs. Petch and her daughters.

When Andrew got downstairs, he found a piece of congealing fried bacon waiting for him in his place, and a cup of tepid tea. This being the first morning, Mr. Herbert Petch passed over the heinous crime of unpunctuality with a little forced pleasantry, but it was plain to Andrew that he had already caused the righteous one to grieve.

After breakfast, observing through a window at the back of the house that the pupils were beginning to arrive, and that one high-spirited lad was trying to

force a handful of earth down the back of a somewhat smaller companion, Andrew went out into the playground, where he found Mr. Springbelt walking rapidly to and fro in a remote corner. Every minute the door at the end of the playground would open, and other pupils would enter, their satchels slung over their shoulders. They were not a bad set of lads; Mr. McKechnie had summed them up to a nicety. They stared very hard at Andrew, and then whispered their comments on his appearance to some particular friend, the comment being almost invariably followed by merry laughter. Andrew pretended not to notice anything of this, but was conscious of tremors of which he was very much ashamed.

Bearing in mind Mr. Herbert Petch's suggestion that he should organise a jolly game to keep the boys amused until they had to go into school, he tried to screw up his courage to the point of starting a game of "Prisoner's Base." The screwing up process was still in progress when Charlie Petch came running from the house with a scared face, and spoke rapidly to Mr. Springbelt. This communication resulted in a more than usually painful set of spasms, after which Mr. Springbelt shouted, in one very low note and one very high one, "All in!" The boys, rather to Andrew's surprise, at once obeyed.

Andrew was about to follow them when Mr. Petch came from the house. He was quite unlike any schoolmaster that Andrew had ever seen, being, indeed, rather in the style of a Salvation Army officer with a mild taste for farming. He was a short man, with a straggling iron-grey moustache, ruddy cheeks, and eyes that glowed with religious emotion. He was

dressed in a black morning coat and grey striped trousers. He wore no gown, and his head was bare.

Noticing Andrew, Mr. Petch at once came up to him and grasped him by the hand.

"Mr. Dick?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I hope they have made you quite comfortable, Mr. Dick?"

"Quite, thank you."

"My son has informed you of your duties?"

"Yes, sir, thank you."

"Very good. I hope you will be happy with us, Mr. Dick. I am a very strict disciplinarian, but I like people around me to be happy."

Mr. Petch spoke in the tone of one who would be extremely annoyed if the people around him were not happy. Andrew also noticed a curious quaver in his voice, constantly suppressed, which bespoke high nervous tension. He subsequently discovered that an intense zeal in all that he undertook was Mr. Petch's chief virtue, a violent temper his chief fault, and nerves his chief cross.

The morning opened with prayers. Mr. Petch read prayers with the same peculiar quaver in his voice, and concluded with a prayer specially composed for the occasion by himself. Mr. Petch prayed that all those assembled under that roof would strive their utmost during the coming term to give satisfaction to their parents and to those placed in authority over them; he prayed that they should be earnest in their work and in their games; he prayed that they would be upright, truthful, honest in all their dealings. He prayed, finally, that if anybody should fail to come

up to this standard, he, Mr. Petch, might not shrink from administering to the erring brother such helpful and stimulating correction as should serve to bring him into line with his comrades and keep him there for the remainder of the term.

Thereupon the whole company rose from their knees, Mr. Springbelt and Andrew brushed their trousers, the names were called over, and school began. The schoolroom was divided into two parts, the larger part occupying the whole of the building, and the smaller part being a little classroom at one end. Andrew was told by Mr. Springbelt that he would find his form in the small classroom, and that they would take the First Book of Kings as their subject for the term. Mr. Springbelt accompanied Andrew to the classroom, and kindly introduced him to the class. The class looked at each other to see whether Andrew was to be taken seriously or treated as a colossal joke. After some slight hesitation, as Andrew affected a composure which he most certainly did not feel, the class decided to give him a chance. They were all quite small boys, ranging from eight years of age to ten or eleven. The method of procedure, Andrew gathered, was to read aloud a chapter, verse by verse, and then, the Bibles being closed, to answer questions that he would put to them and take places according to their answers.

The reading proceeded smoothly enough for a time, but an unfortunate incident occurred just as they were nearing the end of the chapter. Andrew had observed a good deal of inattention on the part of a boy with black hair and a prominent nose who was sitting at the front desk. When this inattention

amounted to dipping his finger into an inkpot and smearing it on the collar of the boy next him, Andrew judged that the moment had come to show that he intended to uphold the discipline of which Mr. Petch was so justly proud. Stopping the reading, therefore, he fixed the boy with the black hair and prominent nose with a terrifying glance, and asked his name.

"Isaacson," replied the boy in a low voice.

"What name? Speak up!"

"Isaacson," repeated the boy, in a still lower voice.

"I can't hear you. What did you say your name was?"

The boy this time said nothing, but several other voices shouted in chorus, "Isaacson!"

"Silence!" cried Andrew. "When I wish any boy to speak, I will tell him so." Advancing towards the culprit, he placed his hand on his shoulder. "Now," he repeated, "what did you say your name was?"

"Isaacson," muttered the boy, almost inaudibly.

"And what is your Christian name?" demanded Andrew.

The class, delighted, held its breath.

"Haven't got one," said Isaacson.

"What's that? What did you say?"

"Haven't got one," repeated Isaacson.

Andrew felt quite certain by this time that Master Isaacson was pulling his leg. He must certainly assert his authority, or he would have no peace as long as he remained at Bayfield College. Drawing his brows down, therefore, as far as they would go, he growled, "Once more, will you, or will you not, tell me your Christian name?"

Isaacson, to Andrew's horror, began to cry. Large tears gathered in those dark Semitic eyes, rolled over that splendid Semitic nose, and dropped with distinct thuds on to Isaacson's Bible.

"There's nothing to cry about," said Andrew, beginning to feel desperately uncomfortable. Suppose Mr. Petch happened to come in? What would he think of his new master who made the boys cry before he had been with them a quarter of an hour? Still, he felt that he was being keenly observed, and that the report of this affair would spread through the school at the first interval.

"If you don't tell me your Christian name," he said, in much the same tone as the judge in his dream had employed when he sentenced him to death, "I shall have to keep you in for half an hour this afternoon after the other boys have gone."

"Haven't—g-got one," gurgled the wretched Isaacson, abandoning himself to the full luxury of unchecked sobs.

"How dare you say that?" demanded Andrew. "How dare you say that you haven't got a Christian name? Everybody has a Christian name!"

At this point, several grubby little hands were shot up into the air, and a small fusillade of snapping fingers arrested Andrew's attention.

"Stop that noise!" he commanded. "If anybody wishes to speak to me, he may put up his hand, but he must not snap his fingers. Now," he added, turning to the oldest and most responsible-looking boy in the class, "what is it you wish to tell me?"

"Please, sir, he hasn't got a Christian name. He's a Jew."

At once Andrew saw the horrible trap into which he had fallen. It had never occurred to him before that a Jew did not have a *Christian* name. It was really a very awkward moment, and he knew that he had suddenly become very red in the face, but the situation must be saved.

"Thank you," he said. "Well, Isaacson, as you haven't a Christian name, will you kindly tell me what they call you at home?"

"Bub-bub-blob," sobbed Isaacson, and there immediately arose such a yell of laughter as brought Mr. Petch himself to the door of the classroom. A hush as of death fell upon the room.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Mr. Petch, struggling to keep his wrath within bounds.

"I'm afraid it's my fault, sir," said Andrew.

"Indeed? Did you make a joke?"

"No, sir, I didn't make a joke, but I happened to put a question to a boy which brought a somewhat unfortunate answer."

"Which was the boy?" demanded Mr. Petch.

"It was a boy called Isaacson," replied Andrew, very much against his will.

"Oh, it was Isaacson, was it? And what question did you put to Isaacson, Mr. Dick?"

"I asked him what they called him at home."

"Yes, you asked him what they called him at home. And what did Isaacson reply?"

"He said that they called him Blob, sir."

"Indeed? That is what they call you at home, Isaacson, is it? Just step this way!"

The wretched youngster, too frightened now even to cry, lifted his little legs one after the other over

the bench, and came walking as delicately as King Agag to the open space in which Mr. Petch was standing.

"So they call you Blob at home, do they? Well, Mister Blob, just hold out your hand."

Isaacson thrust forth a very dirty little hand, and Mr. Petch struck at it with a round ruler which he happened to be carrying. The ruler just caught the tip of Isaacson's fingers, but that was quite enough to bring forth a howl that rang to the roof.

"They call you Blob at home, do they? Blob, eh? That's what they call you, is it? Well, Mister Blob, hold out your other hand!"

Out came the other hand, and again the ruler descended, this time with a slightly firmer result. The miserable Isaacson, grasping the hand that had been struck with the less injured one, turned completely round, and then ran back to his seat. Mr. Petch seemed to be on the point of following him, but dignity stepped in, and he decided that Isaacson had been sufficiently punished seeing that the term was not yet an hour old.

"Let this be a warning to you, Isaacson, and to all of you. Mr. Dick is a new-comer, but that is no reason why he should be insulted. I expect you to show him the same respect that you would show to me, or to my son, or to Mr. Springbelt. Let me hear of any other boy attempting to be humorous at Mr. Dick's expense, and I'll give him the soundest thrashing he ever had in all his days." And with that he returned to the large schoolroom.

The scene had been very distasteful to Andrew, not that young Isaacson was much hurt—he was very much

more frightened than hurt—but because he really did not believe that the boy had meant to raise a laugh against him. Herein he may or may not have shown a knowledge of the nature of boys. At any rate, he decided, then and there, never to expose a boy to the righteous indignation of Mr. Petch if he could possibly avoid it, but to deal with him himself, and after his own fashion.

The Scripture lesson concluded, Andrew walked up the road until he came to a small building in front of which a painted board announced boldly to the world that here Mr. Herbert Pe. h, assisted by gentlemen from the universities, prepared the sons of Gentlemen for the Public Schools. Andrew entered, and found nine sons of Gentlemen in the throes of this desirable process of preparation. They were very small sons of Gentlemen—so small that Andrew had to walk warily for fear of treading on them. They were dressed in nursery fashion, sailor suits being easily the chief favourite. One son of a Gentleman was so complete as to costume that he carried a whistle of piercing force suspended from his neck by white cording; at intervals of a minute or less, it pleasured this son of a Gentleman to blow a shrill blast upon the whistle, whereupon the other sons of Gentlemen rocked with laughter, and Mr. Herbert Petch struggled to combine a smile of paternal pride with a gentle frown of pedagogic authority.

This whistle, in point of fact, set the note for Mr. Herbert Petch's Academy. Discipline was not the main feature of the Academy; neither was learning. Mr. Herbert Petch, with the cunning of a sturdy little serpent, had decided that it was more important to

please the mothers of the sons of Gentlemen than the Gentlemen themselves; in other words, that it would pay him better to send little Cyril and little Horace and little Hughie to their homes with smiling faces than to insist upon a too active preparation for the Public Schools. It was Andrew's chief duty, therefore, to keep the sons of Gentlemen in a state of chuckling imbecility. The letters of the alphabet were to be regarded as so many fantastic monsters performing preposterous capers for the sole edification of the sons of Gentlemen; figures were ugly hobgoblins to be made game of and despitefully used; pot-hooks were fat aldermen struggling along the street in a high wind. It was not exactly the work that he had promised himself when he set out to London with nineteen pounds in his pocket to stagger the world with his brilliance, but it provided him with a piece of bacon on a plate, a camp-bed in a corner, and the society of Mr. Herbert Petch; so he shouldered the task as cheerfully as might be, and transformed himself into a day-nurse with the added and surprising gift of being able to imitate, more or less faithfully, the pictured inhabitants of the average farmyard.

Dinner was the next event. This was served punctually at one o'clock, and Andrew was not wholly delighted to find several of the boys from the larger school, who lived too far off to make the double journey, wedged in between the usual occupants of the table. The meal began with a piece of Yorkshire pudding, set before him, without a word, by Miss Pattie. Andrew had not hitherto come in contact with this custom, which, at any rate, has the economical merit of removing the edge of the appe-

tite before the meat is served. He meekly ate up his pudding and the plate was then removed to be presently brought back containing meat and vegetables. All the dishes were at a side table under the frugal hand of Mrs. Petch.

This, together with a glass of water, completed the business, and Andrew was about to retire to his den for a quiet pipe before afternoon school when he was stopped by Mr. Herbert Petch.

"My father would like you to deliver your History lecture this afternoon to the Second, Third, and Fourth Forms. The whole lesson should last about an hour."

"D'you mean that I've got to lecture for a whole hour? I never lectured in my life!"

"No. The lecture need not last for the whole hour. My father would like you to lecture for half an hour, and then to write a series of questions bearing upon the lecture on the blackboard. The boys should write the answers to the questions in their note-books, and then you will give them the correct replies."

"I see. There's just one thing. Wouldn't it do as well if I read them something out of the book?"

"Most decidedly not. My father holds—and I certainly agree with him—that the attention of boys is arrested far more easily by a lecture than by a reading. That is the whole idea of the lesson."

"My History is most awfully groggy," protested Andrew, beginning to quake exceedingly.

Mr. Herbert Petch looked at him with a stern eye. "Mr. McKechnie gave me English History as one of your subjects," he said.

"Yes, but I didn't expect that I should have to lec-

ture on it without a book. I never heard of that being done at any other school."

"It is invariably done at our school," explained Mr. Herbert Petch, coldly. "I have done it myself for some years past. However, I daresay there would be no objection to your making a few notes. You have half an hour in which to prepare your lecture."

With that he walked off, and Andrew ran up to his den, and seized upon an old History book. The Plantagenet period was the special subject for the term, so Andrew, instead of enjoying his quiet pipe, set to work to cram up as much as possible of the beginnings of the Plantagenet period in half an hour. He had gathered from Mr. Herbert Petch that his notes were not to be voluminous, so he took a postcard from his writing-case, and covered it with very small writing and figures. Armed with this he felt safer, but it was a very nervous and anxious Andrew who presently found himself facing some forty to fifty boys in the large classroom, no other master being present.

The boys listened to his outpourings with attention, for they had not yet tumbled to the fact that Andrew knew no more about the Plantagenet period than was written on the back of his postcard. As a matter of fact, it was not until several afternoons later that they saw through his little ruse, and then one fair-haired angel, with blue eyes and a guileless countenance, raised his hand and asked for the date of an event that had been mentioned two or three afternoons ago. This was a critical moment for Andrew, having no book to fall back upon, but he was equal to the emergency.

"Silence!" he said, sharply. "If you have forgotten

that date, Green, you may look it up in your exercise-book after school, and write it out fifty times. That will perhaps prevent you from forgetting it for the future."

Green subsided, and the situation had been skated over, but Andrew knew that the boys knew that the ice was remarkably thin.

The second hour that afternoon was given up to Mr. Springbelt's Chemistry lecture. A large table was placed at one end of the schoolroom, and the boys were grouped round it, some sitting and some standing. Mr. Springbelt unlocked a cupboard, and placed upon the table a number of weird-looking glass receptacles and other paraphernalia, the mere sight of which gave unbounded delight to his audience. Andrew remained in the room to keep order.

Mr. Springbelt had mastered just enough Chemical Science to enable him to scrape through the London Matriculation. That triumph had occurred some ten or fifteen years before Andrew went to Bayfield College, and Mr. Springbelt had not had the opportunity of adding to his store of knowledge during that period. However, this was not of very great consequence, for even had he been as learned as a professor of the science, he was so wretchedly nervous that he would never have been able to expound his wisdom to any class whatsoever.

"This afternoon," began Mr. Springbelt, twitching so swiftly that the human eye could scarcely follow his movements, "I am going to prepare some hydrogen, and to test its properties. For this we require the following articles which you see here upon the table, namely, a glass trough, a beehive shelf, a taper, a

Florence flask, some zinc, some sulphuric acid, a delivery tube, a rubber cork, a thistle funnel, and some gas jars."

Up went a hand.

"Yes?" replied Mr. Springbelt.

"If you please, sir, what's a thistle funnel?"

Mr. Springbelt at once became so eager to explain the use and purpose of a thistle funnel that he flung himself at the table, and sent a gas jar flying to the floor, where it was smashed into a hundred pieces. A great burst of laughter greeted this feat, which Andrew endeavoured to quell by frowning heavily and shouting, "Silence!" at the top of his voice. His authority was somewhat lessened, however, by his own very obvious desire to join in the merriment. Mr. Springbelt, in the meantime, was hastily collecting the fragments of the gas jar and putting them out of sight. He was really greatly interested in Chemistry, but he found it an expensive hobby inasmuch as the cost of breakages was deducted from his terminal salary.

Order being restored, Mr. Springbelt proceeded to answer the question.

"A thistle funnel," he explained, in a very high voice indeed, "is a glass tube which we thrust through a cork in order that no air may escape from the receptacle except through the delivery tube. Here is one in my hand."

"If you please, sir, why is it called a thistle funnel?"

"Because the top of it is shaped like a thistle," said Mr. Springbelt.

"If you please, sir," urged another student, "thistles aren't like that."

"How d'you know?" asked Andrew.

"Because we've got some in our back garden."

"Then you'd better go and eat them," retorted Andrew, and the laugh was against the interruptor. This cheap little gibe went far to establishing Andrew's reputation as a humorist with a caustic tongue of which it would be well to beware.

"Now," continued Mr. Springbelt, very grateful to Andrew for his assistance, "we set up our apparatus. Here is our glass trough, here is our beehive shelf, here our Florence flask, zinc, delivery tube, sulphuric acid, rubber cork, thistle funnel, and gas jars. We now put the zinc in the flask, and we pour the sulphuric acid on it."

Unfortunately, Mr. Springbelt's hand trembled so much during this operation that he spilled some of the sulphuric acid on to Mr. Petch's table, which produced a very nasty black mark, together with suppressed giggles from the students.

"Silence!" cried Andrew. "If there is any more laughing, I shall have to keep the whole class in for an hour after the Chemistry lecture instead of football."

The very enormity of this threat was sufficient to prove his inexperience in dealing with schoolboys, for they knew that the threatened punishment far exceeded the offence, and was therefore unlikely to be carried out.

"We now," cried Mr. Springbelt excitedly, "see the air being expelled from the flask by the hydrogen!"

"If you please, sir," said a large, fat boy named Henn, "I don't see it."

"I do!" put in a sharp young Hebrew, and there

was a running chorus of "I do! I do!" all up and down the class.

"Silence!" bellowed Andrew.

"I shall now show you," went on Mr. Springbelt, sincerely hoping that he would be as good as his word, "the result of applying a light to hydrogen mixed with air."

There was a rustle of excitement all round the class, several boys endeavouring to elbow others out of the way, whilst Henn made a surreptitious attempt to push a smaller boy right on to the table. This manœuvre was observed by Andrew, who thought it better not to issue any further reprimands at the moment. Besides, he particularly wanted to see the explosion himself.

"You must understand," piped Mr. Springbelt, "that a certain amount of hydrogen is now collected in the gas jar. I light this taper——" He struck a match, and held it with trembling fingers to the taper, which, however, utterly refused to light. Mr. Springbelt, having held the match until it burnt his fingers, struck a second match, but still the taper would not light. This was not very surprising, seeing that Eddie Petch had carefully soaked the taper in water just before the beginning of school. Andrew observed a certain amount of self-consciousness on the face of the dear lad, and also saw him whispering out of the corner of his mouth to his friend Henn, but did not probe further into the matter.

"Since the taper refuses to light," said Mr. Springbelt at last, "I shall apply a match to the hydrogen, and you will then hear the explosion. It is not customary," he explained, "to perform this experiment

with a human hand, a taper being preferable in case of accidents. We will now have the explosion."

Holding the lighted match in two fingers that trembled excessively, he advanced towards the bottom of one of the jars. The class, breathless with excitement, and as still as an empty church, leaned forward. This was one of the great moments of Mr. Springbelt's life. Of such moments he dreamed on happy nights, and with the recollection of such moments he comforted himself when the world was more than usually difficult.

"Now!" cried Mr. Springbelt. "Watch me very carefully. Here in one hand I have the jar containing the hydrogen, the end of the jar being sealed by a small piece of glass. In the other hand I hold the match. I am now going to raise the jar and apply the match to the unsealed end, when the explosion will immediately take place."

The luckless gentleman had just concluded his explanation, and was about to set the crown to his labours, when a very unfortunate thing happened which was entirely due to Eddie Petch's conduct earlier in the afternoon. The match which Mr. Springbelt was holding in his right hand, and upon which the breathless attention of the class was fixed, again burnt itself down to the very end. Mr. Springbelt emitted a shrill scream, flung away the match, also the gas jar containing the hydrogen, and also the small piece of glass with which the end had been sealed.

The delight of his listeners knew no bounds. They banged their knees with their fists, they hugged each other for sheer glee, and shouts of boyish merriment

ascended to the ceiling. Andrew observed that something must be done, and done quickly.

"Go to your desks!" he commanded. "Sit down in your places! I shall take the name of any boy who is heard to make a single sound, and report him to Mr. Petch."

This threat produced an instantaneous effect. The boys hurried to their places, and sat there like knickerbockered statues, hardly daring to breathe. Mr. Springbelt, in the meantime, was sweeping up the remains of the second breakage. The poor little man could have cried with disappointment, and he felt very bitterly the humiliation of having his lecture brought to a conclusion in this summary fashion. Andrew consoled him, however, by suggesting that the boys should be told to write out an account of the experiment, which would keep them quiet until the end of the hour.

CHAPTER IV

A JOLLY GAME OF FOOTBALL—AND ANOTHER LITTLE GAME

THE excitements of the day were not yet over; there still remained the game of football. As soon as the clock struck four, school broke up, and a contingent of the largest boys, accompanied by Mr. Springbelt and Andrew, proceeded to a field in the neighbourhood and enjoyed what Mr. Herbert Petch would have described as a rattling good game. The conditions, unfortunately, were not ideal for perfect bliss. The field was, in reality, a piece of ground so unattractive in every way that nobody would build on it, knowing quite well that, if they did, they would never persuade anyone to live there. It was bounded on two sides by the shafts of an abandoned coal-mine, and certain boys had to be told off to see that the ball did not bounce over the edge of these shafts and disappear for ever. On the other two sides the ground was bordered by the backs of cheap dwelling-places, where various garments swayed and tossed in the grimy air, and gathered unto themselves the peculiarly leaden hue without which their owners would scarcely have recognised them. There was no grass on the field, and the surface, partly owing to the trampling of many feet, and partly to the rain which fell five days out of seven in that locality, had become a shallow lake of grey mud.

Into the midst of this quagmire proceeded Andrew, Mr. Springbelt, and nineteen of the boys, the correct number being presently made up by the arrival of Charlie Petch, who worked in a bank. He, like all the others, was dressed in his ordinary clothes.

"Shall we pick up?" he said to Andrew in a lordly tone.

"If you like," said Andrew.

Charlie Petch picked the boy Henn, and Andrew, as a matter of courtesy, selected Mr. Springbelt. A derisive murmur followed this choice, which Charlie Petch did nothing to discourage.

The sides completed, the ball was placed in the centre, and the two teams took up their appointed places on the field. Charlie Petch played centre-forward for his own team, and Andrew, who anticipated very little pleasure from playing a game under such conditions, placed himself in goal. Mr. Springbelt informed his captain that he usually played forward on the right wing, and Andrew therefore acquiesced.

It was a monotonous game, consisting chiefly of a series of plunges by Mr. Charlie Petch down the centre of the field, through a crowd of boys who were much too small to tackle him, and ending with a long shot at the goal. Most of these went wide, and the others Andrew contrived to save without much difficulty, although he found it necessary more than once to catch the muddy ball in his arms, which caused him much anxiety owing to the very scanty condition of his wardrobe.

When half-time was called, Charlie's team had scored two goals, and Andrew's side were still at nil. He determined, therefore, on a new move, and

placed Mr. Springbelt at centre-half, giving him strict injunctions to interfere with the man Charles as much as possible. Charlie Petch was at first inclined to treat the hovering Mr. Springbelt as a huge joke, but finding the little man very much in the way, he presently lost his temper, and shouldered him on to his back in the mud. Poor Mr. Springbelt picked himself up, and there was a roar of laughter when it was seen that his back was plastered with mud half an inch thick, for a boy is a many-faceted jewel, and can be amused by the consequences of an act even though he is indignant at the act itself.

Andrew waited his opportunity, and then spoke hurriedly in the ear of the victim.

"Go for him!" he urged. "He's as soft as a pudding. Wait your opportunity, and then get him low down as hard as you can barge!"

Mr. Springbelt nodded, and it was evident that he did not lack spirit when once he was sufficiently warm to lose self-consciousness. He made several rapid little dashes at the plump Charlie, but these failed of their full effect owing to Mr. Springbelt's lack of science. At last, however, he saw his chance. The ball had crossed the line at Andrew's end of the field, and a corner-kick had been awarded to Charlie's side. The irresistible Charles stood near the mouth of the goal, waiting for the ball to be delivered unto him. He did not observe that Mr. Springbelt was close at hand, his limbs twitching, his fists clenched, and an expression of wolfish ferocity on his face. The ball was kicked, and Charlie Petch, his mouth open, raised his right foot to catch it on the volley and shoot it through the goal. This was Mr. Springbelt's chance. With-

out waiting for the ball to arrive, he ran madly at his tormentor, lowered his head, and butted him full in the stomach. Down went the plump Charles, and lay where he had fallen, holding both hands firmly to his waist-belt.

This was another of the great moments of Mr. Springbelt's life, amply atoning for the broken gas jars, and the burning of his fingers, and the muddying of his suit. Cries of "Foul!" arose from Charlie's adherents, and there was no doubt about the matter. A free-kick was given, and Charlie managed to rouse himself to the point of taking the kick.

It was now Andrew's turn. He was not very much of a footballer, to tell the truth, but he was quite disgusted with the overbearing, bullying methods of Mr. Charles Petch, who clearly revelled in the fact that most of his opponents were about half his size.

The ball came straight for the goal. Andrew, regardless now of his clothes, caught it in his arms. Charlie Petch and his supporters dashed forward, but Andrew punted it high over their heads towards the centre of the field. Then, disregarding the canons of the game, like one of Ouida's own heroes, he left the goal to take care of itself, plunged through the mob before him, and raced for the ball. Charlie Petch, divining Andrew's intention, also turned and made for the ball.

The boys soon hung back, and simply allowed the two young men to fight the matter out between them. Andrew was a good deal quicker on his feet than the plump Charles, but he had to dribble the ball more than half the length of the field, and he could hear the snortings of his rival over his left shoulder. On

they went, and now there was nobody between Andrew and the goal save a diminutive goal-keeper. But Charlie Petch had drawn level, and was clearly considering the value of his extra weight. Just as he lowered his right shoulder for the charge, Andrew put his right foot in front of the ball, and stopped it dead. At this moment, Charlie Petch, by whom the manœuvre was entirely unsuspected, lunged with all his force at Andrew, and missed him. Owing to the slimy condition of the ground, the poor fellow was unable to keep his feet, and for the second time that afternoon fell prone in the morass. Andrew heard a combined shout of glee from the other end of the ground, but he made sure of his goal before turning round. Then he saw the miry Charles picking himself up.

"Sorry," he said.

"You tripped me!"

"I beg your pardon. I did nothing of the sort."

"Yes, you did. You deliberately tripped me. Those tricks may do for Oxford, but they won't go up here, I can tell you."

Andrew made no reply. It was evident that the youth was mightily enraged, and it was of no use to argue with him until he cooled down. Andrew returned to his goal, and the game proceeded.

Charlie Petch now put forth all his energies in order to recover his prestige and self-complacence. He dashed about more wildly than ever, and several of the little boys found themselves on their backs in the mud. There was still a quarter of an hour to play, and Andrew feared that the game would not end without some other unpleasant incident.

His fears were justified. The boy Green, who was quite a skilful little player, took a pass from Mr. Springbelt, ran down the right wing, and managed to secure a second goal. Charlie Petch immediately ruled that the boy was "offside," and, since there was no umpire, proceeded to help himself to a free-kick. Green emphatically protested that he was not "offside," and appealed to Andrew.

"Come here," said Charlie Petch.

Green approached him.

"What do you mean by contradicting me like that?"

"I only said I wasn't offside."

"Did you hear me say that you were offside?"

"Yes, but I know I wasn't. There were three or four between me and the goal when I took the pass."

"Leave the ground," commanded Charles.

Andrew could not hear very well what was being said, but he saw Charlie Petch talking to Green, and he saw the boy walk towards his coat. It at once occurred to him that Master Charles was exceeding his authority. He was not a master in the school, although he was a son of the Head. If a boy had to be sent off the field, it was clearly the duty of Mr. Springbelt or of Andrew himself to give the order. It would have been wiser, no doubt, to keep quiet at the time and have it out with Charlie Petch afterwards, but youth does not always weigh these matters so carefully, especially when the blood is heated. He walked quickly from his place, therefore, and asked why Green was leaving the field.

"Because he had the impertinence to contradict me," said Charles.

"But who sent him off the field?"

"I did, if you want to know."

"But I understood that Mr. Springbelt and myself were in charge of the boys."

"Then you understood wrong. I've always been in charge of the games in my brother's absence, and I intend to go on being in charge of them."

"If that's the case, I've no more to say."

"That's all right," sneered Charlie Petch.

The game went on, Andrew's side playing one man short. Andrew now definitely abandoned his defensive attitude. Placing one of the boys in goal, he went forward himself, and adopted the rushing tactics that had stood him in good stead earlier in the afternoon. Charlie Petch dashed about like an infuriated bull, but he had really very little skill when it came to playing against a man instead of little boys. When time was called, Andrew's side were three goals to the good, and Andrew realised that he had made an enemy.

As they walked back to Bayfield College, he gave his serious attention to the matter of his wardrobe. Besides the suit he was wearing, he had saved but one other from the maws of Mrs. Doubikin, and that was a dress-suit. He could not very well put on evening dress for tea, but his coat was fairly clean, so he decided to wear the trousers of his dress-suit, and his ordinary coat.

It was impossible that this attire should escape the lambent wit of Mr. Herbert Petch. To the great delight of Eddie, Bessie, and Charlie, he enquired elaborately whether Mr. Dick intended to visit the theatre that night, and, if so, whether he had secured the Royal Box. Andrew, quite aware of the fact that he

had coloured to the roots of his hair, replied as airily as possible that his other luggage had not yet arrived.

"Why not make enquiries at the station about it?" suggested Mr. Herbert Petch, with a wink at the family in general.

"I think I will," replied Andrew very quietly, and Miss Lucy shot him a sympathetic little glance.

As he was going up to his den after tea, he met her on the stairs.

"Are you really going down to the railway-station?" she asked, looking at the bannisters instead of at Andrew.

"Yes, I think so. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I have to go down to the Technical Institute, and I thought I might show you the way to the station in case you don't know it."

"I should be awfully obliged if you would."

"All right. When will you be ready?"

"I'm ready now. I've only got to get my hat and coat."

"Very well. I'll be just outside."

They met at the corner, and boarded a tram. It was a fine evening, for a wonder, and Andrew was thankful to be without the walls of Bayfield College, and his own master for an hour or two. He felt much as a prisoner must feel who contrives to escape from his warders in a fog. He knows he will have to return to the prison; he knows that this little burst of liberty is short-lived; he knows that he is not really a free man with a soul of his own; but it is good to get away from the word of command, from the eyes eternally watching his movements, from the prison walls,

and the routine, and the deadly atmosphere of servitude.

That is just how Andrew felt as he rode on the top of a tram, by the side of Lucy Petch, towards the heart of the city of Floodington. He had only a few coppers in his pocket, and he would have to return to the supper of bread-and-butter and cold water, and the little camp-bed in the corner, but for an hour or two he could pretend to be free; for an hour or two he could pretend to be his own man, as much as the creature in rags with a bundle of newspapers under his arm, or the lordly owner of factories, rolling by in his thousand-guinea car. For an hour he was part and parcel of the life of this great city. He could look his fellowmen in the eyes without shame, for they did not know that he had gone to London to conquer the world with his pen, and had merely succeeded in saving himself from the workhouse by becoming a male nurse to small boys of seven in return for his food and a salary that his father's cook would have laughed to scorn. For an hour he could pretend to be one of the world's real workers; for an hour he could pretend to himself that he was as successful as the clerks and mechanics who passed him on the tops of the home-going trams.

"You are very thoughtful," said Miss Lucy.

"Am I?"

"Awfully. Is there anything the matter?"

"No, I don't think so. Why do you ask?"

"I only wondered. I heard Charlie say something to Herbert about some fuss on the football field."

"Oh? Would it be wrong if I asked what he said?"

"No, I don't see why you shouldn't know. He said

that he had to send a boy off the field for impertinence, and that you disputed his authority, and made a scene. Of course, I don't believe a word of it. I know Charlie too well for that. He's an awful sneak, and a beastly bully, and a funk."

"You don't seem to have an overpowering admiration for him."

"Have you?"

"Oh, I know hardly anything about him yet."

"Well, you will. It all depends which side Herbert likes to take. He always takes which side suits him best. If you keep on good terms with Herbert, you're all right, but if you don't, he'll give you a rotten time of it. The only person he's afraid of is father, and we never complain to father because of his nerves. Herbert knows that, and so he has grown into a regular little tyrant. We all get a turn of it, and I expect you will as well."

There was a great deal of independent spirit about Andrew. He had no money, no position in the world, and no prospects, but something that surged up within him as he listened to Lucy's prophecy convinced him that he would never be able to knuckle under to Mr. Herbert Petch. At this particular state of his affairs, Mr. Herbert Petch represented in a concrete form a world that was hitting Andrew, and trying to deal him a knock-out blow.

"Thanks for the warning," he said, laughingly, as they were about to part. "I'm not really very frightened."

Lucy looked at him with eyes full of admiration. "How splendid it must be," she said, quite unconscious of the irony, "to be a man!"

CHAPTER V

SHOWS YOUNG MR. PETCH IN A TOGA, AND ANDREW BENEATH A STREET-LAMP WITH CALPURNIA

A FEW days later, Herbert Petch had an announcement to make which caused a great deal of excitement in the little world of Bayfield College. It was the custom to give an entertainment in conjunction with the presentation of prizes at the end of the Christmas term. This year Mr. Petch wished to do something to mark the progress—the deserved progress, for Mr. Petch was an honest man, and gave good value for the small fees he exacted—of Bayfield College. Herbert Petch had gathered that Andrew was fairly experienced in the matter of amateur theatricals, and he had therefore suggested to his father that they should take advantage of Andrew's presence to do certain scenes of a play by Shakespeare. The play selected for this signal honour was "Julius Cæsar," and the principal parts had been roughly cast as follows:

Julius Cæsar .....Mr. Springbelt.
Marcus Antonius .....Master Eddie Petch.
Marcus Brutus .....Mr. Herbert Petch.
Cassius .....Master Edgar Henn.
Calpurnia .....Miss Lucy Petch.
Portia .....Miss Jessie Green.

With splendid generosity, Mr. Herbert Petch announced that he would entrust the task of rehearsing

the play to Andrew. Every detail would be under Andrew's care, and even he himself, the great Herbert, would submit himself to Andrew's directions during rehearsal. For the sake of his dignity, Herbert suggested that he could have made a very much better job of the business himself than Andrew was likely to achieve, but he was really too busy with his reading for Ordination to take any considerable part in the play, and he would therefore content himself with the comparatively insignificant role of Brutus.

Miss Jessie Green was the sister of the boy Green who had come into collision with Charlie Petch on the football field. Andrew had not yet seen her, but she was said to be a strikingly beautiful girl, and the closest possible friend of Miss Lucy Petch.

The performance was to take place in the Bayfield Hall on the last night of the term, and a crowded audience was expected, consisting of parents and other relations of the pupils. There would be two or three rehearsals a week, and these would be held in the big schoolroom. The scenery would be mainly composed of curtains, and the costumes would be made at home.

On the evening fixed for the first rehearsal, Andrew went across the playground to the big schoolroom, with a feeling that amounted almost to elation. He had a genuine passion for everything connected with the stage—not the mere infatuation through which all young people pass, but a deep and instinctive love for the art of the theatre. The movement of the curtain concealing the stage from the audience was a great deal more to him than the excitement born of mystery; the curtains were the definite dividing line be-

tween the small world that illustrates, and illuminates, and interprets life, and the great world upon which this art is lavished, and for which these dainties are prepared. His taste lay in the direction of realism. Fantasy and romance were well enough in their way, just as coloured picture-books were well enough in their way; but he could not bring himself to believe that fantasy and romance were the highest function of the theatre. His thoughts on the subject, naturally enough, were not very definite as yet, but his artistic impulse was all for the realistic reflection of actual life—not merely the external forms and shapes of life, but the inner meanings, the emotions, the influence of the whole social pageant upon those who are forced to take part in it, and the reciprocal action of men and women upon each other.

We are all at our best when we are most keenly interested, and Andrew felt that this production of scenes from "Julius Cæsar" was going to give him an opportunity which he needed. He had not made any very brilliant showing in London, and his experiences up to the present as a schoolmaster had not tended to raise his self-esteem; but here was something that he knew he could tackle with a fair amount of confidence, and he was determined to throw himself heart and soul into the work. That was why his pulse beat more quickly than usual as he entered the schoolroom, and found himself face to face with his company.

Mr. Springbelt, his hair very much brushed, was pacing to and fro at the far end of the room, a large copy of the complete works of Shakespeare in his right hand. Every now and then, he would raise his

left hand high above his head, twirl it round sharply, and then point fixedly at a spider's web in the corner of the room.

"Who is it in the press that calls on me?" muttered Mr. Springbelt excitedly. "I hear a tongue, shriller than all the music, cry, 'Cæsar!' "

Charlie Petch, a vacuous grin on his plump countenance, was standing in a characteristic attitude with his back to the stove, and Herbert Petch was talking in his kindest way to Miss Jessie Green and his sister Lucy—more to the former, of course, than to the latter. There were also present some thirty or forty of the boys, who had been pressed into the service in order to form a stage crowd, and also to please as many fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, and aunts as might be.

"Ah," cried the vivacious Herbert, "here is Henry Irving at last!"

Having collected the suitable titter that followed this little pleasantry, he introduced Andrew to Miss Jessie Green. Miss Green was not precisely a strikingly beautiful girl, but she had a pleasant face, brown hair, and a healthy complexion. Looking at her solely with the eye of a producer, Andrew could not persuade himself that she would make an ideal Portia, any more than he expected Miss Lucy Petch to be an ideal Calpurnia, or Mr. Herbert Petch an ideal Marcus Brutus, or Mr. Springbelt an ideal Julius Cæsar. However, he would make the best of the material provided for him.

A place was soon cleared to represent the stage, and desks arranged to form entrances and exits. A certain number of boys were then selected to form the

rabble of citizens and the rehearsal began with the second scene of Act I. Mr. Herbert Petch promptly ran his blue pencil through the first ten lines, which he considered grossly improper. Andrew did not argue the point, but he wondered how much of Shakespeare's work would be allowed to escape the stern pencil of the immaculate Herbert.

If ever a man could be said to attack a part, that man was Mr. Springbelt. He had evidently read somewhere, or been told, that the successful actor must throw himself into his part, and Mr. Springbelt acted upon this advice with an energy that was almost appalling. He tossed his head, he waved his arms, he rolled his eyes, and, more than all, at the end of every sentence he flung his right hand over his left shoulder with a tremendous sweeping gesture.

"Excuse me," said Andrew, when Mr. Springbelt had performed this feat for the twentieth time, "but would you mind telling me why you do that?"

"Do what?" piped Mr. Springbelt.

"Why do you keep on throwing something over your left shoulder as if you were feeding chickens?"

"Oh," explained Mr. Springbelt, with animation, "that's my toga. You see, togas are always falling off, and you have to keep on putting them into place. Besides, it gives one something to do."

"That's an excellent idea," Andrew agreed, "but I fancy that the audience will get a little restive if you replace your toga quite so much; and, anyhow, it's a little early to add these finishing touches to your performance. If I were you, I'd concentrate your attention on getting the lines and positions. The finishing touches can come afterwards."

"Well," interposed Mr. Herbert Petch, "I must say I don't agree with you, Mr. Dick. It seems to me that the more one rehearses the finishing touches the better. I think it extremely clever of Mr. Springbelt to have thought of that business with the toga, and I mean to adopt it myself. As a matter of fact, I think we might all adopt it. Boys," he added, "don't forget that you will all be wearing togas in this play. You know what a toga is—a sort of long, loose wrap, fastened at the shoulder, and wound round the body. Just run indoors, Lucy, and fetch me a tablecloth."

Lucy trotted off, and presently returned with a large tablecloth, which Herbert Petch caused to be fastened with a safety-pin by one corner to the back of his coat. He then pulled the cloth across the front of him, and flung the loose end over his left shoulder. The boys, of course, shouted with merriment, but a fierce glance repressed them. Herbert Petch continued to wear the tablecloth throughout the rehearsal, and the others continued to throw imaginary togas over their left shoulders at intervals of ten or fifteen seconds.

Andrew was in despair, but he thought it better to speak to Herbert privately than to risk a scene in front of the boys. One thing was quite certain —it must be definitely decided whether he had charge of the rehearsals or whether he had not. Two people could not possibly produce a play at one and the same time—although he was to learn later that this feat is often attempted in leading London theatres.

The rehearsal proceeded, and Andrew presently discovered that his eyes would keep meeting the large brown eyes of Miss Jessie Green. Whenever this hap-

pened, they would both look away hastily, not to say guiltily, and Andrew would generally cast a furtive glance at Lucy to see whether she had observed the mutual attraction. Lucy, however, was far too excited with the acting to have time for jealousy. Taking her cue from Herbert, who remained glued to the centre of the stage whenever he was concerned in a scene, she lent the vitality of her Floodington constitution, and the arresting tones of her Floodington treble to the gentle Calpurnia, so that that lady presently emerged from Shakespeare's scheme as something between Boadicea and a North Country lassie hailing an omnibus.

When he felt that he had strutted and shouted sufficiently for one evening, Mr. Herbert Petch dismissed the rehearsal, and Andrew fully expected that he would offer up a short extempore prayer for the success of the entertainment. But this was not so. Herbert Petch told the boys to run home as fast as possible, and hurried into the house, leaving Mr. Springbelt to extinguish the lights. Charlie Petch, hands in pockets, sauntered after his brother, whilst Lucy Petch, with one arm wound affectionately round the waist of her dear friend, Miss Jessie Green, conducted Portia in safety to the gate of the playground. She then stole back to the schoolroom, where Mr. Springbelt was punctiliously turning out the gas, jet by jet, and testing each burner with his nose to make sure that the task had been properly accomplished.

"Have all the others gone in?" asked Lucy.

"Yes, Miss Lucy," said Mr. Springbelt.

But Mr. Springbelt was wrong. Andrew had not yet returned to the house. He was lurking in the

small classroom, with no particular design in his head, except that he was not quite ready for the allurements of thick bread-and-butter and cold water. As soon as Lucy had disappeared, he stole out into the playground, and opened the gate through which Miss Jessie Green had recently passed. To his amazement, the young lady was standing on the other side of the gate.

"Oh," she said, "have you seen anything of my brother?"

"A good deal," said Andrew, "one way and another."

"Don't be silly," replied Miss Green with a giggle.

"I didn't mean to be silly. I saw him in school this morning, and again this afternoon, and again on the football field. In fact, now I come to think of it, your brother has rather a way of being in evidence."

"He's a cheeky little thing. I expect you have to snub him a good deal."

"I shouldn't like to do that," said Andrew.

"Don't be silly." Miss Green giggled again. "I wish you'd tell me whether he's gone home or not."

"I haven't the least idea where he's gone."

"Oh, you know what I mean. Has he left the school?"

"Yes, I think so, unless he's hiding under one of the desks."

"You are too absurd—you really are! Well, I suppose I must run home by myself."

She moved away a little, and Andrew followed, so that the door of the playground swung to behind him, and he was in the roadway.

"Have you far to go?"

"No, not very far—only about three streets."

"Don't you think it's rather late for you to be walking about alone?"

"Oh, I don't know. Dickie ought to have waited for me. Still, it won't take me very long to get home."

"I think I'd better see you as far as your door."

"Oh, no, you mustn't do that."

"Why not?"

"I don't think it would do. You see, we hardly know each other at all."

"Perhaps," said Andrew boldly, "we shall know each other better after I've seen you home."

"I don't think you ought to talk to me like that," simpered Miss Jessie, smiling up at him through the lamplight.

"How would you like me to talk to you?" enquired Andrew, now pacing along at her side.

"I don't suppose you want to talk to me at all, do you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, you've got such a lot of people to talk to at Bayfield College."

"But that's only in the way of work. I like to talk to you for pleasure."

"But don't you talk to Lucy Petch for pleasure?"

"Yes, in a way."

"How do you mean, in a way?"

Andrew perceived that he must tread warily. He had been given quite clearly to understand that these two girls were great friends, and perhaps Miss Green had already been told of the ride on the tram-car.

"Well, you see, I sometimes have to talk about school matters."

"Is that all you talk about? That wasn't what I was given to understand."

"Indeed? What were you given to understand?"

"Oh, I mustn't tell tales out of school."

"That wouldn't be telling tales. Do tell me what she said."

"If I do, will you promise faithfully that you won't tell her I told you?"

"Faithfully."

"Well, she said that you were rather sweet on her."

Andrew was silent. He felt like a man who suddenly finds himself proceeding faster than he had intended down a slippery road.

"That shuts you up, doesn't it?" enquired Miss Green gaily.

"Not at all," retorted Andrew. "I was merely rather taken aback."

"All the same, you know it's true."

"Why do you think it's true?"

"Because Lucy's so pretty. Nobody could help being sweet on her if she wanted them to be."

"Then do you think she wants me to be?"

"Oh, that's asking."

"Asking something to which you don't know the answer," challenged Andrew.

"Don't I?"

"No. I'm quite sure you don't."

"All right, then. If I don't, I don't."

"Do you?"

"You said I didn't."

"I only said that to find out if you did. Do you?"

"P'r'aps I do, and p'r'aps I don't."

"That means you do. I think you might tell me."

"I've told you quite enough already. It isn't fair to give away other girls' secrets. This is our house; good-night."

"I think you might tell me," persisted Andrew.

"Perhaps I will some other time. Good-night."

"Why can't you tell me now?"

"Because Mother's looking out of the window, silly!" And with that Miss Green skipped nimbly up the steps and entered the family nest.

Andrew walked slowly back to Bayfield College. A susceptible young man, at a very impressionable age, he was quite attracted by Miss Jessie Green. It was true that she turned her toes in a little, but she had extremely nice eyes, and the element of flattery entered into the affair more than he realised. It was very flattering to have caught her looking at him at least a dozen times that evening, and he began to wonder whether she really had been waiting for her brother to escort her home. And yet, how could she possibly have known that he would come to the gate of the playground and open it? What made him go to the gate of the playground and open it? Had she willed him to do it? If she had, that would show a certain amount of power over him, and he did not quite relish the idea of any girl having power over him. Except, of course, Sylvia. That was quite different. He was absolutely staunch to Sylvia, but Sylvia was such a long way off, and he had not seen her for such a long time.

And then there was little Lucy. Lucy was not so good-looking as Miss Jessie Green, but she had a very vivacious manner, and had really been extremely nice to him on the tram-car. And so Lucy had actually

told Miss Green that he was sweet on her, and he suspected Lucy of having added that she was a little bit sweet on him! If he were not extremely adroit, things would get complicated at Bayfield College. None the less, life was getting more tolerable every day. As he paced slowly along, Andrew ticked off on his fingers the various items of interest that were at present making life endurable—

(1) Miss Jessie Green, who had nice eyes, and a lot of brown hair.

(2) Miss Lucy Petch, who thought that he was in love with her, and was perhaps prepared to be in love with him.

(3) The rehearsals of "Julius Cæsar."

(4) A letter due from Sylvia.

(5) A feud with Charlie Petch, which ought to prove exciting.

(6) A cheque due from "The Rag-Bag." As soon as this arrived he intended to visit the two leading theatres in Floodington.

They had all finished supper when he got back, and Mr. Herbert Petch was evidently primed for his nightly bout of devotion. He sat with his Bible and Prayer Book in front of him whilst Andrew hastily devoured two pieces of bread-and-butter, and gulped down a glass of water. Meanwhile, the whole family party, including Mr. Springbelt, remained wrapped in silence. Andrew realised that he had brought down upon himself the displeasure of the impeccable Herbert.

As soon as they were in their room, and Herbert had performed his astonishingly speedy toilet, he

looked at Andrew over the top of the bedclothes and said:

"I ought to tell you, Mr. Dick, that my father does not like anyone to leave the house late at night except by special arrangement."

"All right," said Andrew.

"You appear to take the matter rather lightly, Mr. Dick. It is my duty to point out to you that you broke one of the rules of the house tonight. If I were to report the matter to my father, he would be seriously annoyed."

"If you want to know," said Andrew, "I went about a hundred yards down the road for a breath of air."

"I have no desire to know where you went, or how far you went, or why you went; the point is that you did go, and without speaking to me on the subject. I must ask you not to let it occur again."

"But you told me yourself," Andrew protested, "that after school was over for the day, my time would be my own."

"Yes, and that's perfectly true. But I didn't say that we should like you to be wandering about the streets when we were expecting you to supper. If you wish to go to the theatre, or to a concert, or a lecture, that is another matter; but to leave the premises in a surreptitious manner late in the evening, without saying a word to anybody, and then to come back and offer no word of apology or explanation, is lowering my dignity in the eyes of my brothers and sisters, to say nothing of being in rather questionable taste."

"I don't think I need any lessons in taste from you," replied Andrew. "If it comes to a question of taste,

it was hardly in good taste on your part to ask me to conduct these rehearsals, and then to take advantage of your position to contradict everything I said."

"I didn't contradict everything you said. I didn't like the way in which you spoke to Mr. Springbelt, who is a very nervous and sensitive man, and so I took his part. That's all."

"I merely spoke to Mr. Springbelt as I should speak to anybody else who is making a fool of himself at rehearsal, even yourself, if necessary."

"We won't discuss this any more at present. You are evidently losing your temper, so the less said the better."

"I don't care a solitary damn whether I'm losing my temper or not."

Herbert Petch sat straight up in his bed. "Did you use an oath, Mr. Dick?" he asked with a very set face.

"I did," replied Andrew, who felt very much better for having done so.

"Then I must ask you never again to use an oath in my presence. Apart from the fact that I am your senior, and your employer, I am training myself to become a minister of the Church of England, and I consider it the very worst possible form for anyone to make use of bad language in the presence of a clergyman."

"So do I, but you don't happen to be a clergyman yet."

"D.V.," said Mr. Herbert Petch, "I very shortly shall be. I must therefore forbid you to use strong language of any kind in my presence, or in this house, or in my branch establishment."

"Thanks," replied Andrew. "I suppose I may occasionally say 'damn' on the Common?"

Mr. Herbert Petch, apparently oblivious of the fact that he was clad only in his underclothes, scrambled quickly out of bed, and knelt down by the side of it. For nearly a minute he remained in this position, his head buried in two not particularly clean hands. Then he rose, his face very stern and set, scrambled back into bed, pulled the clothes over his head, and utterly refused to be drawn into any further conversation.

CHAPTER VI

HOW ANDREW BEARDED THE ELDER MR. PETCH IN HIS LAIR, AND BROUGHT ABOUT A PAINFUL SCENE

NEXT morning there were two letters for Andrew—one containing the cheque for twenty-five shillings from "The Rag-Bag," and the other from Sylvia enclosing a postal order for ten shillings, the proceeds of the bat and the racquet.

"There are two things in your letter," wrote Sylvia, "that made me quite cross with you when I read them. The first was, 'I suppose there is something in me which makes for failure.' You must never write that to me again. There is nothing in you which makes for failure—only everything which makes for splendid success. It is all the better that success has not come to you too quickly, because success of that kind very seldom lasts.

"And the second thing that made me angry was, 'I hope you won't be too ashamed of me for having failed in my first attack on London.' Here is another thing that you must never repeat. I shall only be ashamed of you if you do something dishonourable; I should never be ashamed of you for having failed. After all, we never know how many people fail who really deserve to succeed. I daresay there are thousands and thousands, but we only hear of the ones who succeed. Even if you are not one of

those—which you certainly will be—it would never make the slightest difference to me. It is just you yourself that I care about, and as long as you are true to that self I ask nothing more, though I hope everything for your sake.

"Whatever sort of school you are in, I know that you will do your best, and I know that they will all love you because nobody could help it. There!"

For all Sylvia's confidence, Mr. Herbert Petch managed to help loving Andrew. As the days rolled on, Herbert grew more and more morose, not only with Andrew, but with the whole of his family. He would upbraid the gentle Pattie for twenty minutes daily if his shaving water was not placed upon his dressing-table at the precise moment when he required it. Half-a-dozen times a day he cuffed Eddie over the head, and threatened to report him to his father for some mysterious offence called "hanging round the shops." He jeered at Lucy for her little affectations, and flung her box of paints across the dining-room. He found fault with Charlie because bank-clerks had shorter hours than schoolmasters, and he girded at his patient mother if she happened to give somebody as good a cut from the joint as he received himself. All this, presumably, was excellent training for one who, D.V., would shortly be a minister of the Church of England.

Andrew knew perfectly well that he was the cause of the change in the once sunny Herbert. The plain truth was that Herbert had become jealous of the new assistant. For some obscure reason, the boys had chosen to take a great fancy to Andrew. Whether

they liked his manner, or whether they found him less of a disciplinarian than Herbert Petch, the fact remained that they had obviously conspired to set Andrew on a pedestal. When the day came to elect a president of the football club, for instance, and the election was conducted by Mr. Herbert Petch in person, the ballot proclaimed that Andrew had been selected for the post by a large majority. True, Mr. Herbert Petch at once quashed the election, pointing out that he had been president for the past nine years, and that there were certain very excellent reasons why he should continue to be president; but that did not get away from the awkward fact that the boys would have preferred Andrew.

Another very unpleasant incident arose out of a debating society started in the school by Herbert. The subject of the first debate was horseracing, and young Mr. Petch opened the debate by delivering a lengthy and quite dull sermon on the evils of horseracing. Andrew, who was present, did not wish to speak on the subject at all, but, after very great pressure from Mr. Herbert Petch, he rose and defended horseracing to the utmost of his ability. He knew nothing about the subject, and cared less. He could have spoken just as well against horseracing, but some little devil inside him rendered it absolutely impossible for him to be on the same side as the pious Herbert. He pointed out that the mere fact of bets being made on races had nothing whatever to do with the matter. The horses themselves did not bet; the horses were noble animals, who raced because they were born to race. They were the highest specimens of their breed, they were pure in thought, pure in intention, and an

admirable example to the human race. In fact, concluded Andrew, if one went to a horserace with an open heart and an open mind, and watched the race for the pure love of the sport, as much benefit might be derived from that visit as from a visit to a church.

Mr. Herbert Petch was on his feet in an instant, his face very white, very earnest, very rigid. "I must protest," he said, "in the most forcible manner at my command, against the remarks that you have just heard. I am sure that Mr. Dick did not mean them, but this is a very dangerous subject on which to speak jestingly. I know that Mr. Petch would be extremely annoyed if he knew that such sentiments had been uttered in the presence of you boys. You may take it from me, boys, that horseracing is thoroughly bad, thoroughly vicious, and thoroughly degraded. I am not now taking part in any debate; I am simply telling you, because I am older than you, and I don't want you to go away with the idea that it can ever be right to attend a race-meeting. It is utterly wrong to do such a thing, and to mention horseracing in connection with going to church is a very serious mistake for anyone to have made, even though it were said in jest. I shall now end the debate, and we will all kneel down for a few minutes whilst I ask pardon for the words that have been uttered in our midst."

This incident was not calculated to strengthen Andrew's authority with the boys, or to cement the breach between himself and Herbert. That breach widened daily, until at last the two, although occupying the same bedroom, and teaching in the same schoolroom for a certain number of hours every day, never exchanged a single word. The situation, of course, was

wholly ridiculous, but it was not of Andrew's seeking. In point of fact, it made him very miserable.

Young Mr. Petch, having humiliated Andrew over the football election and in the debating-room, next proceeded to do the same with the rehearsals. He utterly refused to pay the slightest attention to any suggestion made by Andrew, and he quickly overruled any suggestion that Andrew gave to the other members of the cast. There was nothing for it, therefore, but that Andrew should retire altogether from the rehearsals, and this he did. Mr. Herbert Petch, glorying in his interpretation of Brutus, and serenely satisfied with himself as a producer, promptly took the whole burden upon his own shoulders.

Andrew's one real consolation, during these weeks of sordid bickering and unpleasantness, lay in the theatre. Floodington was a very large and prosperous town, and sported two first-class theatres, in addition to minor theatres and music-halls. The autumn was the time of year when the big managers gave of their best to provincial patrons, and Andrew was thus enabled to witness productions played by leading actors and actresses, and mounted with all the panoply of the West End of London. For the sum of one shilling he could sit in the pit and allow his intellect to batten on the feast of wit and humour served up by the playwrights of the day. Happy evenings, these, wedged tightly amongst the enthusiastic Floodingtonians, and forgetful for three hours or so even of Bayfield College. Once he was allowed to take Miss Pattie Petch as his companion, and on another occasion Miss Lucy Petch. He would have liked to escort Miss Jessie Green to the theatre, but he had not the

felicity of knowing her mother, and shrank from the interview which the invitation would probably have involved. He had not repeated the adventure of seeing Miss Green to her door, but he used to sit at the end of the schoolroom, when rehearsals were going forward, and temper a bitterly sardonic smile—at least, he hoped his smiles were bitterly sardonic—evoked by the bombastic blunderings of Herbert Petch, with softly ardent glances through the gloom exchanged with Miss Green.

Thus matters wore on until half the term was gone, and Andrew, although he had not been engaged for more than one term, felt that he ought to tell Mr. Petch that he could not return to Bayfield College. One evening, therefore, nervous but daring, he came out of his little den and knocked at the door of Mr. Petch's room. Mr. Petch's voice bade him enter.

Mr. Petch was seated in an armchair in front of the fire, reading the local evening paper and smoking a cigar. He seemed surprised when Andrew entered, and even a little alarmed; but he put on a half-smile of welcome, and waved his hand towards a vacant chair. Andrew sat down.

"You wish to speak to me about something, Mr. Dick?"

"Yes, sir. As we have now arrived at the half-term, I thought I ought to tell you, as a matter of form, that I shall not be returning to Bayfield College next term. Of course," he added hastily, "you may not want me."

Mr. Petch stared. His face gradually clouded over, and the blood rose to his temples.

"I must say, Mr. Dick, I am very surprised by your

statement. May I ask why you have thought it necessary to make it?"

"Well, sir, I thought we ought to have a clear understanding on the matter. I presume that you will be wanting to look out for somebody else."

"Certainly I shall have to look out for somebody else. At the same time, I should like your reasons for not wishing to return to us. I am quite satisfied with the way in which you discharge your duties, and I hoped that you were quite happy and contented with us."

"If you will excuse me, sir, I would rather not give my reasons."

Mr. Petch began to grow quite angry, and Andrew noticed with considerable apprehension that two veins on the forehead of his employer were protesting against the extra strain put upon them.

"But I must insist upon having your reasons," cried Mr. Petch, thumping the arm of his chair with his fist. "Here you walk into my room when I am reading my evening paper, and calmly inform me that you do not wish to return to this establishment, and yet you refuse to state your reasons. I presume you *have* a reason? I presume you have not suddenly gone out of your mind, Mr. Dick?"

"No, sir, I have not, but, if I gave you my reasons, it would involve a third person, and that would not be quite fair."

"Not fair! D'you think it fair to me that things should be going on under my roof of which I am absolutely ignorant? I take a very great pride in my school, Mr. Dick, and it is a serious blow to me that a young man can come here for seven weeks or so, and then

definitely decide that he will not return under any conditions whatever. Is it a matter of salary?"

"No, sir, it's nothing to do with salary."

"Do you object to your work?"

"Not exactly to the work."

"Oh, now we're getting at it. Is it to the conditions of the work that you object, Mr. Dick?"

"Well, sir, since you put it in that way, I must admit that it is the conditions."

"Come, come! Let us be a little more definite. What is there about the conditions under which you do your work to which you object so violently? Are the hours too long? I think you get plenty of time to yourself?"

"Yes, sir, I get plenty of time to myself. In fact, I get almost too much time to myself."

A light suddenly seemed to break upon the elder Mr. Petch. He gripped the arms of his chair very firmly—so firmly that the blood receded from his nails, and probably went up into his forehead. Drawing down his iron-grey eyebrows as far as they would go, he leant towards Andrew, and said in a voice that was really hoarse with suppressed rage: "Is it anything to do with Herbert?"

"I would rather not answer that question, sir."

"But I insist upon an answer. I will not have things going on under my roof of which I am totally unaware. Once again, Mr. Dick, has it anything to do with my eldest son?"

"Well, sir, I had no intention of mentioning the matter, but since you insist upon an answer, I must admit that we are not on speaking terms."

"Not on what?" roared Mr. Petch, unable to repress his furious indignation any longer.

"Speaking terms," replied Andrew.

"D'you mean to say that my son works in the same room with you, and yet you don't speak to one another?"

"I'm afraid that's quite true, sir. I daresay," added Andrew, anxious to avoid the painful scene which now seemed almost inevitable, "it's as much my fault as his."

"Nonsense!" roared Mr. Petch. "Herbert is a good deal older than you, and he is your senior in the school as well. This is his home, and you come to it as a stranger. It is perfectly monstrous that he should be behaving in this way, and I shall sift the matter to the bottom here and now."

It was too late to stem the torrent. Mr. Petch rose from his chair and violently rang the bell. Pattie came running to answer it, and the scared expression on her face was intensified when she saw Andrew sitting there.

"Send Herbert to me at once."

Whilst they were waiting for Herbert, Mr. Petch walked up and down the room in short angry strides, muttering to himself all the time:

"Not on speaking terms! I'll show him! I'll give him speaking terms! The young cub! The ill-mannered rascal! Oxford, indeed! *I* had no university education! So this is what it does for a man! Speaking terms! I'll speak to him in terms that he won't forget! Young viper! Poltroon! Toad!"

At this point, Herbert Petch tapped at the door.

"Come in!" shouted his father in a tone that would have terrified an enraged bullock.

Herbert Petch entered, and Andrew felt extremely sorry for the little fellow directly he caught sight of him. His face was quite white; all the stubbornness, all the self-complacence had vanished from it; he was reduced to the level of an ordinary human being, and a very abject human being at that.

"You wish to speak to me, sir?"

"Yes, sir, I do. Shut the door. We will go straight to the point. It is not my custom to beat about the bush. Mr. Dick, here, tells me that he will not be returning to Bayfield College next term. I asked him for his reason, and he told me, very unwillingly, that you and he are not on speaking terms. Is that true?"

Herbert kept his little eyes fixed steadily on the face of his father. There was an expression of entreaty in them very pitiable to see.

"I should like to explain the whole circumstances of the case," he began.

"Never mind the whole circumstances of the case," retorted Mr. Petch. "Those will do later. I know you've got the gift of the gab, but I don't want it just at the moment. I want a straightforward answer to my question. Are you on speaking terms with Mr. Dick, or are you not?"

"Well, sir, we haven't been talking very much to each other just lately, but——"

"I don't want any of your 'buts'! How long is it, Mr. Dick, since you and my son exchanged a single word?"

"I should think about a week," replied Andrew. It

was nearer three weeks, but he was tempering the wind to the trembling lamb.

"Indeed? A week, eh? And so for a whole week this ridiculous nonsense has been going on, and all the boys must have noticed it, to say nothing of everybody in the house being made uncomfortable! I don't blame you, Mr. Dick; as I told you before, Herbert is much older than you, and this is his home, and he is the senior master. Now, Herbert, my friend, just you listen to me. You've not been my son six-and-twenty years for nothing. I've got a temper, but it's a quick temper, and I generally manage to control it. You've got a temper, too, but it's a beastly sulky temper. It goes on for days and weeks. I thought I'd thrashed it out of you, but I find I haven't. If I did as I felt inclined to do, I should take my cane out of that cupboard, and break it over your back!" Mr. Petch actually took a step or two towards the cupboard as though he intended to gratify the desire; but he stopped in time.

"And I will break it over your back, schoolmaster or no schoolmaster, graduate or no graduate, parson or no parson, unless you mend your ways and treat Mr. Dick as he ought to be treated. I don't want to hear anything more about the matter. I've told you what I think, and I mean it, every word. Now you can go."

Herbert Petch turned, and crept meekly from the room.

"Now, Mr. Dick," continued Mr. Petch, "I think you will have no further trouble in that quarter. I like everybody in my house to be happy. I can't bear the thought that anybody is not happy. You will oblige

me very much if you will make it your business to be happy for the remainder of the term. And just give the matter a little consideration, and see whether you cannot return to us after the Christmas holidays."

He returned to his chair, and took up the paper with hands that trembled a little.

Andrew went back to his den, and dropped a line to Mr. McKechnie. He liked Mr. Petch well enough, but he knew that he could never again believe in the sincerity of Herbert Petch, however that young gentleman might smirk and smarm.

CHAPTER VII

PROVES ONCE AGAIN THE BALEFUL INFLUENCE OF THE THEATRE UPON YOUTHFUL MINDS

THE long term gradually drew to an end, and little was talked of but the play. Herbert Petch had become extremely cordial in his manner, and prevailed upon Andrew, at the last moment, to stage-manage. So Andrew found himself with the whole responsibility of the show upon his shoulders after all.

It went off surprisingly well. Brutus preached, and Anthony piped, and Cæsar twitched, and Calpurnia sang, and Portia trilled, and the crowd yelped, and the friends and relations in front clapped their hands till they were sore, and wept tears of delight. There never was such a night! There was Mr. Petch in his blackest coat shaking hands with everybody, and beaming at everybody as though life were one huge bed of roses! And there was Mrs. Petch, in her best silk gown, and her sweetest smile, pouring out coffee and lemonade, and cutting cake, and keeping a watchful eye on the pile of sandwiches lest the boys should devour them instead of the parents. There was Mr. Herbert Petch, bang in the centre of the stage, flinging his toga about, and bowing to the audience after each scene as though he had written the play all out of his own dear little head, and could write another dozen

such with a turn of the wrist. And there was Charlie Petch, in one of his father's coats, much too small for him, and one of his father's white waistcoats with two buttons missing, and a pair of white gloves that had split all across the palm when he was putting them on, and his hair standing quite straight up in front. And there was Miss Pattie Petch, fagging about with plates of sandwiches and cups of coffee, and saying the right thing to everybody, and yet finding time, every now and again, to visit one corner of the room where a young man with a very knowing look and an insufficient knowledge of auctioneering was lolling languidly against the wall. And there was Miss Bessie Petch, in a pair of very long black stockings, and a very uncomfortable little white dress that stuck out all around her knees, sitting in the very middle of the front row, tossing her hair about, and generally realising the importance of her position as the daughter of the headmaster. There was Mr. Springbelt, clad in a huge white counterpane, and far happier than the real Julius Cæsar could ever have been in his life, strutting to and fro, with his head very much to one side, and tumbling over his toga, and having such wonderful spasms on the stage that the audience went away fully convinced that he was ever so much madder than Hamlet. And there was Miss Jessie Green, standing in a remote corner with her face turned up to Andrew, gazing straight into his eyes whilst he applied huge quantities of blue grease-paint to her eyebrows and eyelashes, with a hand that trembled very much from his emotion at being so near to so much loveliness.

And the Dean made a speech, and Mr. Petch made a speech, and Herbert Petch made a speech, and everybody was extremely delighted with himself. And the reporters of the local papers made little marks in their note-books which, being transcribed, informed the world of Floodington that "where all acquitted themselves so ably it would be invidious to mention any names in particular," and thus saved themselves a great deal of trouble, and gave pleasure all round.

At last it was over, and Andrew found himself in a rather dark passage with Miss Jessie Green, who was still dressed as Portia, save that she had on an ordinary hat in place of her little coronet. In her arms she had a large bundle which contained her usual clothes.

"How are you going home?" asked Andrew.

"I'm going to walk up with Father and Mother. I think they're waiting for me at the front entrance."

"I don't think so. There's nobody at the front entrance. They've all gone."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I'm nearly sure."

"I don't believe you know anything about it."

"I know that I'm leaving Floodington tomorrow, and that we may never meet again."

"That will be a great trial for you, won't it?"

"I shall be awfully sorry—for some things."

"What things?"

"Well, there are some people in Floodington I should like to see again."

"Really?" Miss Jessie Green carefully examined the corner of her parcel.

"Let me carry that parcel for you, will you?"

"Oh, please don't trouble. Father will carry it."

"But your father has gone on—I'm sure he has. We'd better slip out by the side door. Come on!"

So they slipped out by the side door, and were presently walking through the quiet streets. They did not say very much, for Andrew was screwing himself up for a very daring step. He was trying to make up his mind to steal a kiss from Jessie. He had never kissed her yet, but he felt that it would be a pusillanimous thing to leave Floodington without kissing such a very charming girl. He had a vague sort of notion, too, that Miss Jessie rather expected to be kissed, and that she would entertain but a poor opinion of him if he did not kiss her. At the same time, he knew quite well that she would resist the kiss when it came to the point, and that he would have to use strategy to effect his purpose neatly and quietly.

He was still carrying her large parcel. When they arrived at the front gate of Mr. Green's house, there were lights within, but all the curtains were drawn. Andrew gave the parcel to Jessie, and she held it in her arms. This was the moment for which he had schemed.

"Goodbye," said Andrew.

"Goodbye," replied Jessie.

"You will write to me, won't you?"

"If you write to me first."

"Very well. Goodbye."

She was just going to turn away; it must be now or never. He leant forward, placed his hands on her shoulders, and imprinted a kiss that was almost fraternal in its chastity upon her cheek. Then he turned

quickly, and walked away down the empty street, feeling that he was a very desperate and dashing fellow indeed.

Lucy opened the door to him, still dressed as Calpurnia, her cheeks unnaturally red from the rouge liberally applied by Andrew

"You *are* late!" she whispered. "What on earth have you been doing?"

"There were one or two little things that had to be seen to," replied Andrew.

"Yes, I daresay!" retorted Lucy in her most arch manner.

"You look awfully nice," observed Andrew.

"I don't believe you mean it."

"I do—really I do. . . . Where are all the others?"

"Having supper. Father's there as well. We'd better hurry in."

"Why?"

"Oh, because they'll think things."

"What will they think?"

"Oh, I don't know, silly. Come along."

"Wait a moment."

Lucy turned and looked up at him. Did she, too, expect to be kissed? It would be a tremendous accomplishment to have kissed them both in the space of ten minutes. Besides, it was hardly fair to kiss Jessie and leave little Lucy out in the cold.

Thus Andrew argued with himself, but such arguments will not excuse him in the opinions of a virtuous and stainless world. Let it be merely recorded, therefore, that he put his arm about Lucy's shoulders, and kissed her in precisely the same manner

as he had kissed her greatest friend. Lucy, secure in the knowledge that her blushes could never be detected under so much rouge, danced into the supper-room, followed at a sober pace by the criminal Andrew.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. WEEVILL ON THE WEEVILL FAMILY, AND HIGH LIFE AT WARWICK HALL

WHEN Andrew left Floodington, he had just enough money in his pockets—the residue of a salary that had been steadily encroached upon by his need for the playhouse—to tide him over the Christmas holidays. Sylvia had begged him to spend Christmas with her mother and herself, but Andrew had replied that he would not show himself in his native place until he could go down there crowned with success. He would have liked to accept the invitation for many reasons; it would have been good to get back to the old life for a little while, and to sit next to Sylvia in the old church, and to sing the Christmas hymns, and join in the dances and general merriment of the district where he was so well known. But, on the other hand, he would have to run the gauntlet of all kinds of questions; everybody would want to know how he was getting on in London, and for which papers he was writing, and where he lived. Then he would have to confess his failure, and explain that he was merely an almost penniless usher instead of a successful literary man. He shied at the thought, and made up his mind to four weeks beneath the roof of Mrs. Doubikin.

That lady was delighted to see him, and could ac-

commodate him in his old room at the old terms. She would have dearly loved to take him in for nothing, this being Christmas time, but her duty to Mr. Doubikin absolutely forbade such generosity. Mr. Doubikin had not been at all himself. He had been out late at nights once or twice, and was now suffering from the effects of a fast life. The doctor had ordered him port wine, a beverage to which Mrs. Doubikin was apparently rather partial herself. Andrew enquired after her heart, and was sorry to learn that it grew feebler every day, and that she had more than once been compelled to sit on the kitchen stairs for half-an-hour before she could get either up or down. Nothing but her duty to Mr. Doubikin prevented her from taking to her bed, and spending the remainder of her life in the luxurious ease of a sick-room.

The cheerful Jane was still in Mrs. Doubikin's service, and conducted Andrew to his attic just as she had done before. When they reached the top landing, she confided to him that all his shirts and nice clothes had been taken to the pop-shop, and that her master and mistress had kept high festival in the kitchen for three weeks after Andrew's departure. As for Mr. Foottit and Mr. Crichton, she, the cheerful Jane, had never set eyes on those gentlemen since the day they left so hurriedly, but it was her belief that they were not so very far off, and that some folks could walk straight to the spot with their eyes shut—that is to say, when they were in a condition to walk straight anywhere. As for cheerful Jane herself, she had been thinking of getting married, but had hesitated on the very brink because she could not make up her mind whether the young man in the fried fish

shop really loved her for herself, or whether he had in some way discovered that she had fourteen shillings wrapped up in a flannel petticoat at the bottom of her trunk.

The next morning, Andrew called at the offices of Mr. McKechnie, and was received by that gentleman with a passionate fervour almost startling in its intensity.

"Left Petch?" cried Mr. McKechnie. "My dear sir, of course you left Petch! I never thought you'd care for a school of that stamp, but you would go! You know very well that you stood here and told me to my face that you insisted on going to Bayfield College! Now you see the result. Here you are, back again from the North, complaining to me that you had a miserable term of it! Another time, perhaps, you will be guided by one very much older than yourself. I know exactly what you want. You want charming surroundings, palatial if possible, but at the very least charming! You want a house of distinction in the country, people of taste and refinement all about you. An atmosphere of aristocratic England! Well, I have the very thing. Just run your eye over this."

He produced a letter from a gentleman of the name of Weevill, who wrote from Warwick Hall, Brentford. Mr. Weevill wanted a young man, a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge preferred, excellent at games, with some experience as a schoolmaster, patient, good-tempered, of refined appearance, well-dressed, of gentle birth, and fond of music. To such a person Mr. Weevill offered, in return for his exclusive services, board and lodging at Warwick Hall, Brentford, and a salary of twenty-five pounds per annum. Mr. Wee-

vill could guarantee a very happy home, the Weevill family being particularly high-spirited, and himself a man bubbling over with the joy of life. His pupils were all charming little fellows, with exquisite manners, and hearts of gold.

"I know Weevill," said Mr. McKechnie. "He always comes to me for his masters. Thorough man of the world, Weevill. You'll learn more schoolmastering from him in a week than you would from most of these duffers in ten years. I should strongly advise you to go to Warwick Hall if you can secure the post. Charming country house standing in its own grounds. Built by a man of great artistic taste who went bankrupt. Weevill jumped in and nabbed it. Just the place for a school—Brentford. Bracing, close to London, Kew Gardens, splendid tram service, grand water. I'll tell Weevill to meet you here the day after tomorrow. You'll like him enormously. Good-morning."

Mr. Weevill and Andrew duly met in the dark little room at the back of Mr. McKechnie's office. Mr. Weevill was a very small man, very thin, with a ragged, iron-grey moustache, and bow legs. He had spent a great portion of his early life in a tropical climate, and all his flesh had been melted off him never to return. His greatest ambition in life was to be mistaken for a sporting squire. To this end, he habitually clothed himself in tweed knickerbocker suits with an enormous pattern. The suits were extremely baggy —so baggy that Mr. Weevill was able to move about inside them rather like a cat under a hearthrug. He wore brown boots, a brown bowler hat, and carried a smart little cane.

"Good morning," he said to Andrew, rising and carrying the large suit across the room and then back to his chair again. "I suppose my friend McKechnie told you all about Warwick Hall?"

"Mr. McKechnie mentioned that you had a very nice house."

"Yes, it's a nice enough house in its way. Compared with the majority of private schools, I suppose you might call it a palace. There are many little improvements that one would like to carry out; as a matter of fact, I've been thinking of pulling it all down and rebuilding it on a plan of my own. The trouble is to know what to do with the boys in the meantime. Are you fond of games, Mr. Dick?"

The wily Andrew pumped up a spuriously enthusiastic grin.

"That's right. I like my men to be crack athletes. My son, of course, is a champion in several departments. His health is not all that it might be, or he would certainly have won the lawn tennis championship two or three years ago, and he is the equal of any of the finest golf players in the kingdom. His batting average is generally somewhere about ninety, he is a remarkably fine bowler, and nobody can touch him at all on the football field. Then he holds various records for running, jumping, and the like. You've probably often seen his name in the papers—Christopher Conrad Weevill?"

Andrew was compelled to confess that the name had escaped him.

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Weevill. "That's an extraordinary thing! Up to a few years ago, Christopher's name was a household word throughout the

length and breadth of the land. He's such a modest fellow, though, you could never get him to consent to an interview, not even in the 'Times.' I often begged him to exploit himself a little more, if only for the sake of the school; not a bit of it. I understand you do a little writing, Mr. Dick?"

"Just a very little," said Andrew.

"Ah. You must get my daughter Patricia to give you a few hints about writing. Most marvellous girl! I suppose there's nothing that girl couldn't achieve if she set her mind to it. Wrote a five-act play when she was ten years old—wrote the whole thing in less than a week. Her mother and I were really quite anxious about her, her brain worked so quickly. You'll hardly believe it, Mr. Dick, but we had to keep her under morphia for weeks at a time to stop her brain working. The only possible way to save her reason, so the specialist said. She wanted to go to Girton; the specialist absolutely forbade anything of the kind. They said there was no doubt she would carry everything before her, but it would certainly be at the cost of her health. She writes poems now in her spare time—beautiful little things—make me cry like a child. I've sat up quite late at night, when everybody else was in bed and asleep, crying bitterly over Patricia's poems. One of the leading publishers offered her a thousand pounds down for a volume, but she refused it. I agreed with her there. Her poems are much too fine to be scattered broadcast for any Tom, Dick or Harry to read. Ever do any hunting, Mr. Dick?"

Andrew said that he had occasionally hunted in a very mild way.

"Passion of my life," explained Mr. Weevill. "Hunt-

ing, jumping, steeplechasing, anything on a horse. When I was in India, I used to live on horseback. I mean literally. I've been in the saddle for days on end—eating, drinking, even sleeping in the saddle. We used to travel hundreds of miles in that way, myself and one or two chums. Shooting, of course, all the time. I bagged seventeen lions to my own gun one trip. Ever shot any lions, Mr. Dick?"

Andrew replied that he had never even seen a lion, except in cages.

"People in this country," said Mr. Weevill, "have an extraordinary idea about lions. They really think that the lion is a fierce and dangerous animal. Nothing further from the truth. The lion is merely a superior sort of dog, and you can get them to come when you whistle, and eat biscuits out of your hand. I had a tame lion of my own in India—one that I wounded out shooting, and brought home and tamed. Chris and Patricia used to ride on his back. You'd have roared with laughter to see those little monkeys riding about on a lion, pulling his ears, digging their little heels into him. Oh, yes, most affectionate and domesticated animal, the lion, if you know how to handle him. But this is all by the way. I merely wished to give you an idea of life at Warwick Hall. The conversation round our supper-table, although I say it myself, is probably the most brilliant either in or out of London. You have myself as the authority on all field sports; my son as the authority on athletics; my daughter as the authority on literature and the drama. And then there's my wife—have I mentioned my wife, Mr. Dick?"

Mr. Dick assured him that he had not mentioned Mrs. Weevill.

"Mrs. Weevill is really a very remarkable woman. Her knowledge of medicine and surgery is equal to that of the finest doctors in the land. Mrs. Weevill can bandage you, poultice you, drug you, or stitch you up with unerring precision and the most delicate touch conceivable. What I owe to Mrs. Weevill nobody knows but myself. Well, Mr. Dick, I've taken a great fancy to you, and I think you are just the sort of young man that I want. How would you like to try a term at Warwick Hall?"

"The only question is," said Andrew, "about the salary. Twenty-five pounds a year is not really a very vast sum, is it?"

"Yes and no," replied Mr. Weevill. "If you take twenty-five sovereigns, and lay them out on a table, and ask me if that is a vast sum, I reply most emphatically in the negative. It is not a vast sum. It is a paltry sum. It is a sum that I would not offer to a gentleman on any consideration whatever. If I thought that you were coming to me for the sake of the salary that I was going to pay you, I should insist on naming four times that amount. I should say one hundred a year, and not a penny less; but you are not coming to me for the sake of the salary. You are coming to me, in the first place, because you are a gentleman, and you wish to live in a beautiful house such as Warwick Hall, and enjoy the brilliant society of myself and my family. You are coming to me, in the second place, because you know perfectly well that you have only to mention to any schoolmaster in the kingdom that you have been an assistant at War-

wick Hall, and he will implore you, with outstretched arms, to come to him on your own terms. Regarded from that point of view, the mere money is so small a consideration that it is not worth mentioning. In point of fact, I don't know why I did mention it. I don't know why I didn't ask you for some kind of premium, say a couple of hundred pounds. But that is not the custom of the profession. The custom of the profession is to pay a salary; and therefore I mentioned the first sum that came into my head—say twenty-five pounds! That is the exact position of the case, Mr. Dick.

"And then there's another thing. You are a literary man, and you naturally wish to have time for your literary labours. Very well, I encourage that. I like that. I like to think of you, under the protection of my hospitable roof, pouring out from your brain and your soul works that will illuminate this dingy world with rare flashes of genius. I say I like to think of that, and therefore you may be quite certain that every facility will be afforded you for indulging your literary bent to the full. When I come to think of it, why shouldn't you and my daughter collaborate on a drama or a novel? Much might come of it! A most delightful idea!"

Mr. Weevill again animated the voluminous tweeds, shook Andrew by the hand, and then intimated that the interview was over. Andrew retired to Mr. McKechnie's office, and told Mr. McKechnie that he would accept thirty pounds a year, and not a penny less. Mr. McKechnie nodded sagely, and Andrew passed through to the landing, where the stalwart clerk was marshalling a number of other young men who

were no doubt waiting to be told about the athletic Christopher, the poetic Patricia, and the tame lion that carried them both upon his back when they were little children.

In the course of a few days he heard from Mr. McKechnie, who informed him that he had screwed Mr. Weevill up to the sum required, and that Andrew would be expected at Warwick Hall on the twenty-first of January.

Andrew employed himself during the remainder of his holidays in writing little stories and articles, two or three of which eventually found their way into print. He also dropped a line to Mr. Inchboard, telling him of his change of address, and expressing a desire to meet him. Mr. Inchboard promptly made an appointment at a public-house in the Strand, and there Andrew found him an evening or two later, perched on a high stool, drinking hot whisky and water with sugar in it.

"Beastly cold," explained Mr. Inchboard. "Nearly dead. Everybody nearly dead. Murder case. Out all night. Police baffled. Tracked murderer down myself. Brilliant story. Used everywhere. All the placards. Chief quite overcome. Paid me half-a-sovereign. Must have made forty quid out of it. Beast. Don't know why I stay. Don't know why anybody stays. We all do. Live and die there. Mostly die. Have a drink?"

Andrew accepted a whisky-and-soda, and regaled Mr. Inchboard with some account of his adventures in the North. Mr. Inchboard nodded, and lit another cigarette.

"I know. Always the way. Son of the house. Too

big for his boots. Hit 'em. Hit 'em in the eye. Hit 'em on the nose. Hit 'em anywhere. Only thing to do. Always my policy. Hit everybody first day. After that, some chance of peace. Any girls?"

Andrew told him, in an offhand way, of his triumphs with Lucy Petch and Jessie Green.

"Girls," said Mr. Inchboard, sighing as he stirred up his hot whisky-and-water. "Girls. Quite impossible. Poisonous fruit. Very tempting. Thirsty man. Pluck the fruit. Poison. Down you go. Agony and misery. Always keep clear of girls myself. Quite impossible. Nothing but trouble. Mean well sometimes. Born wrong. One of Nature's colossal mistakes. Shocking blunder thousands of years ago. Can't stop it now. Too late. No way of putting it right. Poor old humanity. Steadily getting worse. Death rate going up. Birth rate going down. All wiped out soon. Have another drink?"

Andrew ordered two more drinks, and asked Mr. Inchboard whether the vacancy on the staff of the Lightning News Agency had yet been filled up. Mr. Inchboard replied, in a very husky voice, that the staff was still in a depleted condition, but that there would shortly be another vacancy, as the man who sat on his left could not possibly last longer than three months.

"Terrible thing. Can't breathe. Has to be thumped on the back. Young fellow. Bright prospects. Charming family. Full of ambition. Came to London just like you or me. Joined our staff. I knew what would happen. Watched him from week to week. Began to give way. Fainting. Falling downstairs. Falling upstairs. Inanition. Not enough food. Not enough

sleep. Close atmosphere. Bound to go. Poor lad. Want his job?"

Andrew signified that he would be very willing to risk his life in the employment of the Lightning News Agency if they would give him a chance, and Mr. Inchboard again promised faithfully that he should receive a telegram when the man on his left suddenly expired. They then went to a music-hall, where Mr. Inchboard was received with considerable courtesy by the management, and shown into a box. Mr. Inchboard expressed supreme disgust with every turn in the programme, and found it necessary to make several pilgrimages to the bar. At midnight they parted, Andrew to sleep off the effects of at least five whiskies, and Mr. Inchboard to sit up all night in the offices of the Lightning News Agency, and disseminate details of horrible catastrophes amongst the provincial papers who subscribed to the night service of the L. N. A.

CHAPTER IX

MR. INCHBOARD SENDS A TELEGRAM, AND ANDREW GOES TO TOWN

WARWICK HALL was a largish house, quite modern, with large bow windows on each side of the front door, and two white pillars supporting the porch. The pillars had been put there to indicate that Warwick Hall was no ordinary dwelling house, but the home of a man who considered himself of considerable importance in the world because he had amassed sufficient money to build a house like Warwick Hall. There are a great many houses of the Warwick Hall type in this poor old England—houses built, not for comfort, not for beauty, but to show the world that somebody or other has succeeded in getting rather more than his share of the world's goods.

When Warwick Hall came into the market as bankrupt stock, Mr. Weevill had seized upon it, and started a school just one degree higher than Bayfield College. The parents were attracted by the size of the house, and the pillars supporting the porch; for the sake of the pillars, they overlooked the fact that this particular part of Brentford was rapidly becoming a dumping-ground for cheap villas. From the windows of Warwick Hall, the pupils were able to study jerry-building in all its phases. There were complete rows of jerry-

built villas, both of the detached and semi-detached variety; there were rows of jerry-built villas that lacked only their doors and window frames; there were villas in the actual process of being jerry-built, so that you could look over the wall, and trace out for yourself the silly little dining-room on one side of the passage, and the pretentious little drawing-room on the other side, and the stuffy little kitchen at the back. Finally there were the materials for more villas about to be jerry-built—scaffold-poles that had already done much fell work, piles of cheap red bricks, heaps of mortar, and heaps of sand. All day long you could hear the merry ring of the bricklayer's trowel as the villas were shoved together, the future homes of toiling Englishmen and Englishwomen, most of whom would never know that they were encouraging some rascally builder and some cynical architect—save the name!—to disfigure the fair face of this beautiful land.

Mr. Christopher Weevill met Andrew at the station. He was surprisingly unlike his father, being quite six feet in height and very taciturn, not to say morose. He had a ragged black moustache, long loose legs, and wore pince-nez.

"Hullo," he said to Andrew. "You Dick?"

"I am," replied Andrew.

"Come on."

They walked up to Warwick Hall, where Andrew was introduced to Mrs. Weevill and the miraculous Patricia. Mrs. Weevill was a very gentle lady, who had the air of one for whom the cares and troubles of life were a great deal too much. As long as Andrew remained at Warwick Hall, he never saw Mrs.

Weevill at rest. She fagged about, upstairs and downstairs, in the dormitories, in the dining-room, in the matron's room, from very early in the morning until late at night. Often when Andrew was going to bed he would notice a light in the linen-room where the boys' clothes were kept, and, glancing in, would see Mrs. Weevill patiently going over piles of vests and stockings and socks—a task that seemed and was interminable. At meals it was just the same. She had no time to look after her own food; she was for ever serving and serving and serving, and her restless eyes were for ever roaming from plate to plate to make sure that everybody was receiving proper attention. She never spoke unless absolutely compelled to do so, still less frequent was her smile; when she did smile, it was like a sudden gleam of sunlight on a dark day in winter—quite unexpected, very sweet, with very little life or warmth in it, gone almost as soon as it came. Such was Mrs. Weevill, as she appeared to Andrew.

The bewilderingly intellectual Patricia was rather like her brother—tall, spare, dark, always wearing pince-nez. Her intellectuality was so pronounced that it could not have escaped a hod-carrier. If you had met her out walking, you would have said to yourself, when she was still a quarter of a mile off, "Here comes a very intellectual young woman." You could see it in the shape of her hats, and the way she put them on, and the cut of her skirts, and the angles of her thin shoulders. When she spoke to you, looking at you very coldly and clearly through the pince-nez—which, by the way, are always rather a mean advantage—you would have said to yourself, "This young wo-

man belongs to the intellectual type. I am a mere worm in comparison with her. She dominates me. I must make haste to bow down and worship or she will wither me with an ironic epigram."

The staff was completed by the other assistant-master, Mr. Barry, a very pleasant young fellow, some twenty-four years of age, who had the misfortune to be entirely bald. He was a very fair footballer, and always played without a cap. This led to a peculiar mistake on the part of the mother of one of the boys, who enquired of Andrew, as she watched Mr. Barry skipping about from one end of the field to the other, "Who *is* that very nimble old gentleman?" Mr. Barry loathed schoolmastering, and cherished ambitions of becoming a successful barrister, to which end he would retire to his bedroom whenever an opportunity occurred, with the ostensible purpose of studying the Law. He would begin by lighing a pipe, and then his eye would be attracted by a novel or "The Sportsman," and Mr. Barry would succumb. He was a very good-natured fellow, cheerful by disposition, but depressed by circumstances. When the latter became too much for him, his language regarding the whole Weevill family, with the honourable exception of Mrs. Weevill, was really appalling to hear.

Christopher, Mr. Barry, and Andrew divided the "duty" between them. Andrew was thus "on duty" two days a week, and every third Sunday. On such days his duties were as follows:

6.30 a. m. Called.

7.00 a. m. Rouse boys from slumber, and superintend their washing and dressing operations. Button stiff collars for smaller boys.

7.30 a. m. Conduct boys to schoolroom for preparation. Call over names, and make a list of those coming down late, a little more latitude to be allowed to pupils paying the highest fees.

8.00 a. m. Conduct boys to the dining-hall, and say grace.

8.45 a. m. Return to the schoolroom, and serve out such stationery as required by the boys. No boy to be stinted in this respect, there being a distinct profit on every exercise book, sheet of blotting-paper, pen, pencil, or nib sold.

9.00 a. m. Get all the boys into the schoolroom for morning school.

11.00 a. m. Be present in the playground to see that the big boys do not kill the small boys during the "break." Special latitude in this respect to be allowed to the pupils paying the highest fees.

11.15 a. m. Reassemble the boys in the schoolroom.

12.15 a. m. Be present in the playground whilst the boys enjoy themselves in the same manner as during the break.

1.00 p. m. Conduct boys into the dining-hall for dinner.

1.30 p. m. Return with the boys to the schoolroom or the playground, and remain with them until afternoon school.

2.00 p. m. Collect all the boys in the schoolroom for afternoon school.

4.00 p. m. Change, and conduct boys to the field for football.

5.00 p. m. Return with the boys to the school, and superintend their changing.

5.15 p. m. Conduct boys to the dining-hall for tea.

5.45 p. m. Return with the boys to the schoolroom, and keep them amused until the hour for preparation.

7.00 p. m. Settle the boys in their places for preparation, and keep a watchful eye over them until 8.30.

8.30 p. m. Conduct boys to the dining-hall for supper.

9.00 p. m. Conduct boys to their dormitories, and unbutton stiff collars for the smaller boys.

9.15 p. m. Turn out the lights in all the dormitories.

9.20 p. m. Descend to the dining-room for supper and an hour of the most brilliant conversation in or out of London.

When Andrew was not on duty, his day was light enough, though he was always expected to join in the games. He chiefly suffered, during these hours of relaxation, from lack of companionship. Christopher Weevill did not care for the society of anybody but himself, and Mr. Barry was on duty on Tuesdays and Fridays. On Wednesdays and Saturdays, when Mr. Barry was off duty, there were generally football matches, in which Mr. Barry played; so that Andrew had to be content with long, lonely rides on a bicycle which he had hired from a shop in the village. Occasionally Miss Weevill accompanied him in these excursions, but Andrew denied himself this exquisite pleasure as much as possible, realising that he was by no means a worthy companion for any young woman so intellectually endowed as Patricia.

Patricia at first seemed to take kindly to Andrew, and encouraged him to talk to her and to cycle with her, but when Andrew became a little elusive, Patricia's manner towards him changed, and became

intellectually Arctic. This led to one of two little differences between Andrew and Mr. Weevill.

One morning, Mr. Weevill called Andrew into his study, and asked him at what hour the boys began their morning preparation when he (Andrew) was on duty.

"Oh, about half-past-seven," said Andrew easily.

"Are you sure?"

"Well, I don't always look at my watch, but that's about the hour."

"Oh." Mr. Weevill's sharp little face looked a shade more cunning than usual. "Because, as you may be aware, the boys have to pass my daughter's room on the way downstairs, and she is in the habit of timing them to see that they are not late for their morning preparation. She tells me that when my son and Mr. Barry are on duty, the boys are down very punctually, but that when you are on duty they are often ten minutes, a quarter of an hour, or even twenty minutes late. My daughter is very rarely mistaken in these matters. I must ask you to be very much more punctual in future, Mr. Dick."

The other difference with Mr. Weevill was more serious. Andrew had had a rather good stroke of luck with a little paper called "The Halfpenny Screamer." It was an illustrated paper chiefly appealing to boys, and Andrew had sent them a short story of a broadly farcical nature. They had promptly paid him a guinea for the story, and had commissioned him to write eleven more of the same sort. Andrew used to yield to the temptation to write these stories during school hours, and one afternoon, when he was

thus engaged, Mr. Weevill entered the room, and walked straight up to Andrew's desk.

"What are the boys doing, Mr. Dick?" he asked.

"They are re-learning their geography."

"But that is not the way for boys to learn geography. If they don't know their lesson, you should make them stand round your desk and teach it to them. That is the method I pursue myself, and which I expect my masters to pursue."

After school that same afternoon, Andrew received a message summoning him to Mr. Weevill's study. Mr. Weevill was engaged in the extremely congenial task of adding up the amounts for stationery debited to each pupil.

"Oh, come in, Mr. Dick, will you? I think, when we met in Mr. McKechnie's office, something was said about your being interested in literary work, was it not?"

"I believe it was," replied Andrew.

"And do you still keep up that interest, Mr. Dick?"

"Certainly I do."

"Quite right. And when do you find time for your writing, Mr. Dick?"

"All sorts of times."

"Always in your own time, I presume?"

"No; sometimes in yours."

"That is very frank of you, Mr. Dick. I'm glad you were frank about the matter, because, as a matter of fact, I had ascertained for myself that you were inclined to do your writing during school hours."

"I knew that," said Andrew.

"I see. Now do you think it quite fair to me, Mr.

Dick, to do your own work when I am paying you to teach the boys?"

"That's just the point," Andrew explained. "If you paid me to teach the boys, I shouldn't be compelled to earn money by writing, either in school or out of school. The amount you pay me is just about enough for the work I do in looking after the boys—buttoning their collars, seeing that they clean their teeth, and preventing them from falling into the fire. If you engage a good man, and the man is willing to earn his salary by extra work instead of asking you to pay him in full, it seems to me that you have the best of the bargain."

Mr. Weevill smiled. "That's a very excellent argument, Mr. Dick, and I don't say that there is not some truth in it. But we can't either of us get away from the fact that these boys are sent here by their parents to be educated, and you can't educate boys whilst you are writing stories for the papers. Surely you can manage to write your stories in your own time?"

"I don't quite know when," mused Andrew. "Two days a week I am on duty from the first thing in the morning till the last thing at night; every day of the week I am expected to play football; and when the boys are neither playing football nor at work, the din is so terrific that nobody could possibly write."

"At any rate, you have two Sundays out of every three to yourself."

"Hardly to myself. I have to go to church in the morning, and we have a service here in the evening. In the afternoon one naturally likes to get a little fresh air and exercise instead of sitting in a very

small bedroom, trying to balance a blotting-pad on a wash-hand-stand with a large hole in the middle."

"Well, how would it be, Mr. Dick, if I gave you Sunday mornings instead of asking you to go to church? I generally do my accounts on Sunday mornings, and you might keep me company by writing your stories. What do you think of that plan?"

"I think it a very excellent plan," said Andrew. "That will suit me admirably."

So every Sunday morning, as soon as the boys had trooped off to church, Mr. Weevill and Andrew would light their pipes and sit down to their writing-tables in adjoining apartments. The only drawback to the arrangement was that Mr. Weevill could never resist an audience, and was constantly interrupting Andrew's work by describing to him the glories of his past career, and the amazing achievements in their respective departments of Christopher and Patricia.

In such style the weeks wore through, and the dull monotony of it all began to have its effect, as it was bound to do, upon Andrew's mind and upon his soul. There was not even a Lucy Petch or a Jessie Green to lend a little colour to the sordid day. He had not the faintest interest in his scholastic work, and very little interest or pride in the pot-boilers that he was turning out for "The Halfpenny Screamer." The postal orders were pleasant enough to receive, but the Oxford tradesmen were beginning to dun him for clothes, boots, and books, and threatening the usual legal processes if their claims were not settled.

Was there any way out of it? Andrew was an optimist by disposition, but his optimism had been dealt blow after blow, and was now in a very pulpy

state. Sometimes he thought wildly of paying another visit to Mr. Socrates Quain, or to Mr. James Keep, or to Mr. Douglas Campbell, but his courage failed him when he took up his pen to write to them, and the letter remained unwritten. If they refused to have anything to do with him when he was well-dressed and full of confidence, what would they say to this shabby, unsuccessful usher from a third-rate school? His articles were returned to him with sickening regularity, and even more sickening printed expressions of regret. Clearly, there was no place for him in the world of London journalism.

What else could he do? Sometimes he thought wildly of going on the stage. Yes, but how did one get on the stage? It was easy to talk of going on the stage, as one talks of going for a walk or going to bed, but what was the process? Why on earth should any manager in his senses entrust him with even the very humblest of duties? And, if any manager could be found with sufficient intelligence to engage an entirely inexperienced young man, what would he pay him for his services? A pound a week? He would be worse off then than he was at Warwick Hall. No, he must just grind on, and Sylvia must drift further and further away until this grey existence was finally rounded off in utter blackness.

Andrew had actually reached this despondent pitch when suddenly something happened. As long as he lives, he will never forget that something. It was a bleak, miserable day in March, and Andrew, much against his will, was changing for the usual game of football with the boys. There came a tap at his door.

"Yes?" he shouted.

"Telegram for you, sir."

A telegram? Who could possibly have sent him a telegram? Was it from Sylvia? Was there something the matter? Was it her mother? Sylvia had hinted in her last letter that Mrs. Kesterton had seemed to be in failing health of late.

Andrew opened the door, and took the telegram. The small boy who had been sent up with it clattered away along the uncarpeted corridor and left Andrew staring at the scribbled words that were to change the whole course of his life.

"Man dead meet me bun shop noon tomorrow Inchboard."

In a flash the whole world had changed for Andrew. It was not a bleak and depressing day in March—it was a gloriously sunny day in mid-June. He was not a wretched, ill-paid usher about to engage in a feeble pretence at a game with a lot of little boys—he was a very fortunate young man with all his life before him and all the world at his feet! He was not a person for whom the great and dazzling Fleet Street had no use—he was one of the men privileged to sway mankind with a flowing and an eloquent pen!

His spirits were so high that afternoon that the boys, and Christopher, and Mr. Barry scarcely knew him. He rushed about the football field like a mad thing, and when the ball was not near him, and when he was not chasing after the ball, he had to leap high into the air to relieve his feelings. He indulged in a fierce but friendly bout of charging with Mr. Barry, and succeeded in laying that bald-headed young gentleman on his back in the mud. He even made a

frantic rush at the taciturn Christopher, and bounced off Christopher's bony body as though he were an india-rubber ball swiftly thrown against the side of a house.

In school it was just the same. He simply could not be serious, and the class pealed with laughter again and again, and told each other that Mr. Dick was a jolly good sort, and the nicest master they had ever had at Warwick Hall. Immediately after school he tackled Mr. Weevill in his study, and demanded a release from his duties on the following morning.

"This is very unusual, Mr. Dick," protested Mr. Weevill. "I don't think I can spare you tomorrow morning. I might manage it one day next week."

"I'm afraid you must spare me tomorrow morning," replied Andrew, looking the little man very hard in the eye.

"Indeed? Is it a matter of such importance?"

"It's a matter of the very greatest importance. In fact, it is a matter of such importance that if you cannot let me off I shall be compelled to take French leave. This is the first time that I have asked for a single hour off during the whole term, and I can't believe that you will be so unfair as to refuse me."

Mr. Weevill saw that Andrew meant what he said, and presently gave way with the best possible grace. He was very curious to know the nature of Andrew's business, but Andrew had learnt not to communicate such vague things as hopes to unsympathetic strangers. If he got the appointment on the L. N. A. he would tell them all quickly enough.

Mr. Inchboard was not at the Bun Shop at noon, but he sauntered in shortly after one, Andrew, in the

meantime, having been compelled to swallow three glasses of beer to pay his footing. Mr. Inchboard had a whisky-and-soda, and then briefly explained the situation.

"Man dead," he repeated. "Not the one I told you about. Another one. Reporter. One of our men applied for his job and got it. That means a vacancy. I nobbled old Pincumbe, and told him about you. Pincumbe's the manager. He'll see you this afternoon at three. Don't be afraid of him. Talk to him. Tell him you want to live and die in the service of the L. N. A. You probably will. He won't offer much. Take it. Better than nothing. Then look round. Clear out while you have the strength. And don't get married. Girls? My hat! Have another?"

Andrew very wisely declined to have another. He thought it scarcely likely that he would make a favourable impression on Mr. Pincumbe if he presented himself for the first time in a state of intoxication. Thanking Mr. Inchboard very heartily indeed for his kindness in remembering him, he sent a telegram to Mr. Weevill informing him that it was impossible to get back in time for afternoon school, bought himself a clean collar, and then, for the sake of old times, went to an A.B.C. shop and had a piece of lunch-cake and a cup of cocoa. At three o'clock to the minute he was handing in his name at the offices of the Lightning News Agency.

If ever a man deserved to succeed in the world, that man was Mr. Pincumbe. From the very moment that he himself entered the service of the Lightning News Agency, he had put aside all mortal weaknesses. He had convinced himself that the Lightning News

Agency was the grandest, the noblest, and the most beneficent institution in England. It existed for the purpose of enriching everybody. It enriched the proprietors of newspapers because it helped them to fill their columns with suitable material at a very cheap rate. It enriched Mr. Pincumbe because the shareholders recognised that he was enriching them, and they did not object to Mr. Pincumbe receiving a good salary so long as their material was cheap and their dividends were high. Finally, it enriched the gentlemen employed by Mr. Pincumbe to collect the news of the world, to sub-edit it, and to re-despatch it. These gentlemen used to complain, naturally enough, that they were not enriched in the same proportion as Mr. Pincumbe, and Mr. Inchboard was one of the most violent in his abuse of the L. N. A.; but that is the way of things in an ungrateful world; there is always a fly in the ointment; Mr. Pincumbe was happy in the knowledge that the ointment was very good ointment, and he did not let the presence of the fly interfere with his duty to his shareholders.

"I understand from Mr. Inchboard," said Mr. Pincumbe, "that you are anxious to join the service of the Lightning News Agency in the capacity of sub-editor, Mr. Dick?"

"Yes," said Andrew, with difficulty restraining himself from adding "please."

"Well, Mr. Dick, the Lightning News Agency is a very great institution, wielding enormous influence, and every member of the staff, whatever his duties, is in a position of enormous responsibility. What experience have you had in newspaper work?"

Andrew explained that he had written various arti-

cles and stories for various papers, but was obliged to confess that he knew little or nothing of the inside working of a newspaper office. Mr. Pincumbe listened attentively. His expression and general attitude could not have been more sternly critical had he been considering Andrew as an applicant for the editorship of the "Times."

"That is all very well, Mr. Dick, but you evidently know little or nothing of serious journalism. If I give you a month's trial on the Lightning News Agency, I presume that you are prepared to put forth all your energy and ability in order to prove your worthiness of becoming a regular member of the staff?"

"Certainly," Andrew assured him, with a sincere earnestness that there was no mistaking. "I should not spare myself in the very least. I am desperately anxious to get a footing in Fleet Street, and I am absolutely sure that I could very soon master the work required of me. I don't mind what my hours are, and the salary doesn't much matter as long as I can live on it."

"H'm. . . . Have you brought any specimens of your work with you, Mr. Dick?"

"Oh, yes." Andrew produced a fairly fat packet of assorted samples, and laid them on Mr. Pincumbe's desk. Mr. Pincumbe looked them through, and then returned them to Andrew with a slight shake of the head. Andrew's heart sank.

"All very well in their way, Mr. Dick, but not at all the sort of work that we send out from this office. We deal, you understand, in real news. To perform efficiently the work of the Lightning News Agency, it is necessary for a man to be well versed in the politics

of the day, both English and Continental. It is necessary for him to have the geography of the world at his fingers' ends; to be able to verify a date or a quotation like lightning; to be able to detect in an instant good news from bad; to have the capacity for condensing the message of one correspondent to a few lines, or to extend another message to the length of a column. He must be indefatigable, sober, keen, a stylist —in short, a potential leader writer, or a potential Editor of a daily newspaper, or a potential Cabinet Minister. Now, Mr. Dick, do you think you have all these qualifications?"

"Certainly," replied Andrew, with extreme gravity.

"Well, we will see. Your friend Mr. Inchboard speaks very highly of your abilities, and I am willing to give you a trial." (Andrew's heart leapt.) "When can you start?"

Andrew explained that he was at present assistant-master in a private school, and that the term would end in about a fortnight's time.

"Very good, Mr. Dick. I will give you a month's trial, and you will commence work here on Monday fortnight. Your hours will be from seven o'clock in the evening until two in the morning, including Saturdays. On Sundays you will come to the office at three o'clock in the afternoon, and remain until ten. Monday evenings you will have to yourself. I like my staff to get plenty of recreation. Your salary will be two pounds fifteen shillings a week. At the end of the month, I shall be able to tell you whether I wish to retain your services or not. You will kindly let me have a letter during the course of tomorrow to tell me that I may rely upon you. Good afternoon."

Andrew went back to Warwick Hall enwrapped in a haze of bliss. He had not the slightest doubt of his ability to "make good" with the Lightning News Agency, although at present he knew nothing whatever of the actual duties. He was determined to wear himself to the bone if need be, and to sell papers in Fleet Street rather than return to the galling bonds of usherdom.

CHAPTER X

SHOWS ANDREW, NOT ONLY IN FLEET STREET, BUT UP TO HIS NECK IN IT

PUNCTUALLY at seven o'clock in the evening of the day appointed, Andrew entered, for the first time, the Night Editorial room of the Lightning News Agency. He saw before him a room of fair size, chiefly furnished by a long table. There were six men seated round this table. At the head was Mr. Sandford, the Night Editor. Mr. Sandford was a broad-shouldered man, with a brown beard tinged with grey, and very light blue eyes. He was smoking a long clay pipe, and by his side was a large glass half full of beer. On Mr. Sandford's left sat Mr. Eyeslip, a tall, dark, clean-shaven, rather weary-looking man, who seldom looked up from his desk, and still more seldom spoke. Then there was Mr. Bradbury, who had been in the office ever since he first started his professional career as a messenger-boy. Mr. Lenney faced Mr. Sandford. Mr. Lenney was a short man, clean-shaven, rubicund, and astonishingly cheerful. How he managed to look as though he lived from year's end to year's end on a farm, whereas everybody knew that he was a barrister by day and a journalist by night, was the amazement of the office. There was an empty chair on Mr. Lenney's left for Andrew. Mr. Inchboard occupied a chair on Andrew's left, and

Mr. Goldy made up the party. Mr. Goldy had a somewhat military appearance, having served in the Yeomanry, and was therefore the authority on all military matters.

Behind Andrew, a slanting desk affixed to the wall ran almost the entire length of the room. On to this desk, "flimsies" were flung as fast as they were filled. A "flimsy," Andrew discovered, was a number of thin, transparent pieces of paper interleaved with "blacks," so that everything written on the top leaf was reproduced on all the leaves underneath. An individual known as the "Corporal" would seize the flimsies, remove the blacks, place one sheet on a file by way of record, and send the other sheets down to the basement in a lift. Here they were dealt with by the staff of messengers. If they were for the country papers, they were sent round at once to the nearest post office; if for the London papers, messenger-boys dashed off with them to the various offices.

An inner door led to the room occupied by the telegraph operator. From this room there emerged, every few minutes, a dark-haired gentleman rather blue about the chin, whose duty it was to send and receive messages either by telegraph or by telephone. In one corner of this inner room stood a tape-machine, which was clicking most of the evening. As it clicked, an endless tape, covered with typewritten messages, dropped slowly to the floor, and collected itself in coils like a huge snake, until one of the sub-editors, either on his own initiative, or at the bidding of Mr. Sandford, would tear it off at a suitable place, place it by him on the table, copy the messages on to flimsies, and send them away to the country papers.

Sometimes there was a lull in the work, and then one of the messenger boys would be despatched to a neighbouring bar for pints of beer, a very useful tonic and refreshment for the tired workers. Those who drank beer took it in turns to "stand the round"; Andrew became of their number. If anyone grew hungry, the same messenger-boy would be sent to the same restaurant, and return with a plate of cold beef, or a plate of hot beef, or steak-and-kidney pudding, or any other dainty that the restaurant happened to have on its bill of fare for that night.

Mr. Sandford gave Andrew a very friendly welcome, and he was introduced to all the other members of the staff by Mr. Inchboard. That gentleman then showed him how to place a flimsy upon the little slanting desk in front of him, and how to hold it in place with the spring-catch at the top of the little desk. The Corporal supplied him with a "stylus," Mr. Sandford passed him down a telegram from a country correspondent, and Andrew, within five minutes of having entered the room, was hard at work. He was a little nervous, but the work was really very easy. He had to copy out the telegram on to the flimsy, correct any mistakes in spelling, verify such names of towns as seemed doubtful, lick the English into shape a little, give it a short and suitable heading, and fling it on to the Corporal's desk to be sent down to the messenger room. When the tape fell to his turn, he did not feel quite so assured, the news being all from foreign sources; but he soon found that the matter was pretty reliable, and there was always the comfortable feeling that the ultimate responsibility rested with the sub-

editors of the country papers who would handle the message on arrival.

At eleven o'clock, at Mr. Inchboard's suggestion, he sent out for a plate of cold beef, a roll, and some butter; he was astonished to find how hungry he had become since dinner—so hungry that there was not a scrap of anything left upon his plate. A draught of beer, a loaded clay pipe, and he was at it again in truly professional style. During intervals of work, he listened to the conversation, most of which was directed at, or came from, Mr. Sandford, as though he were the interlocutor of a group of nigger minstrels. Mr. Sandford, fortunately, had a keen sense of humour and a genial manner; he set the keynote of the room, which was thus cheerful, not to say jolly. Mr. Sandford took an especial delight in twitting Mr. Inchboard, constantly urging upon him to reconsider his decision as regards matrimony, and pointing out that the race expected Mr. Inchboard to do his duty like a man and a citizen. Mr. Inchboard ignored these pleasantries for the most part, either smoking his long clay pipe in silence, or keeping his attention fixed upon his work. Andrew was surprised to observe that the little man was an extremely rapid and neat worker: he subsequently discovered that Mr. Sandford entrusted many a ticklish task to his favourite butt.

At midnight Mr. Sandford went off duty, and at one o'clock he was followed by two or three other members of the staff, including Mr. Inchboard. Andrew, of course, remained until two o'clock, being now under the presidency of Mr. Glasspole, who had taken over control from Mr. Sandford at midnight. As a rule, there was not very much to be done after twelve

o'clock, most of the big speeches being reported direct to the papers, and the correspondents of the L. N. A. having ceased from troubling. But occasionally there would be a sudden alarum, and then the depleted staff would have to pull themselves together and get through the work before they could leave for home.

Such an alarum, in a small way, came one morning at two o'clock during Andrew's first week at the L. N. A. He was just going off duty, feeling pretty done after seven hours of almost continuous scribbling in a close room; but, being anxious to gain experience, and also to impress Mr. Pincumbe with his keenness, he volunteered for the job. A "runner"—that is, a street loafer in search of half-a-crown—had brought word to the office that there was a big fire in the city. Mr. Glasspole acquiesced, and Andrew rattled away in a hansom.

Twice the cab had to pull into the gutter in order to allow fire-engines to go by in all the majesty of their galloping horses and clinking chains. At last they came to a crowd of people held at bay by the police, and Andrew jumped out of the cab. Looking over the heads of the crowd, he could see the engines drawn up in an open space, and the firemen running to and fro. The fire had started in the basement of a large photographic warehouse, and a series of explosions lent an added excitement to the affair. Flourishing the police-pass given to him by Mr. Glasspole, Andrew was admitted into the cleared space, and felt that he was part and parcel of the show. He drew as near as he dared to the fire, and importantly made a few notes on his cuff about nothing in particular. But one

feature of interest did strike him; he noticed that the burning house was only two doors away from a church.

"What church is that?" he asked of a policeman.

"Bow Church," replied the policeman.

At once Andrew's journalistic instinct was all ablaze. Of all churches, this one, perhaps, was most beloved of the Londoner, for was it not the bells of this church that had called to Dick Whittington to turn again? Had he not often been told that no man was a true Cockney unless born within the sound of Bow Bells? He waited until the firemen seemed to be getting the better of matters, and then he returned as quickly as possible to the office. Next morning, he had the felicity of seeing his paragraph in the late editions of the principal London papers, with his own heading:

ALARMING FIRE IN THE CITY

BOW CHURCH IN DANGER

If Mr. Pincumbe ever heard of this self-sacrifice on Andrew's part, he never mentioned it. The salary handed to Andrew at the end of the week by Mr. Sandford was two pounds fifteen shillings, and not a penny more. But how could Mr. Pincumbe be expected to hear of everything?

On another occasion, a little later on, Andrew had an opportunity of satisfying his craving for sensational night-work to the full. It so happened that Mr. Goldy had lingered after one o'clock in order to smoke a final pipe and have a chat with Mr. Glasspole and Andrew. Mr. Goldy, as a matter of fact, was in the very middle

of recounting one of his innumerable stories of amorous adventures, in which he easily outshone Don Juan, when news came, again by a runner, of a double murder and suicide at Woolwich. The story went that a lunatic who lived in a house with his aged father and mother had suffocated the old couple with gas fumes, and had then poisoned himself in a similar fashion. Mr. Goldy at once scented a good column for the evening papers, and, as Andrew's time was now up, asked him if he would care to accompany him. Andrew jumped at the chance, and they hurried downstairs, and out into the street.

It was a bitterly cold night, or rather morning, and fog threatened. Mr. Goldy had a very poor opinion of the trains to Woolwich at that time in the morning, so he called a hansom at the expense of the L. N. A. and they both jumped in. The man protested a little when he was told to drive to Woolwich, but Mr. Goldy brandished his military moustaches at him, and off they went. Before they had driven very far, they were in the thick of the fog. Down it came like a huge opaque sheet, completely hiding the houses on either hand, swallowing up the electric lamps as though they had been wax vestas, blotting out the traffic, blotting out the sordidness of the streets, making the horse cough, making Andrew cough, making Mr. Goldy cough, and making the driver cough. Presently the driver pulled up, climbed down from his seat, thrust his beery face round the corner of the cab, and knocked at the window which they had let down. Mr. Goldy raised the window and asked him, with a military oath, what he wanted.

"I cawn't see ter drive through this 'ere, Guv'ner," grumbled the man.

"Then lead the horse," commanded Mr. Goldy.

"Lead 'im all ver wye ter Woolwich?"

"Yes," ordered the indomitable Goldy, "and further than that if necessary."

He dropped the window, and off they went again, this time at a foot-pace. Andrew had seldom been so cold in his life before, but he lighted his pipe, turned up the collar of his coat, listened to Mr. Goldy's adventures, and congratulated himself that this was indeed the real thing. Every now and then the cab would stop, and the cabman would put a query as to his whereabouts to a policeman, or a brother cabman, or some miserable bird of the night. There would come a growl through the darkness, and then they would go forward again, slowly advancing towards Woolwich.

At last they reached Woolwich, only to discover that the street they wanted was in the neighbourhood of the Arsenal, a long way further on.

"'Ave I got ter lead 'im all ver wye ter ve Awsenal?" asked the cabman.

"You have," replied the relentless Goldy.

"Well, this is a nice blinking job, this is!"

On they went, flip-flop, flip-flop, and at last, after many more enquiries, the cab stopped in front of a row of dingy-looking houses, fronted by dingy-looking gardens. Mr. Goldy and Andrew jumped out, and found a policeman at the gate of the garden path that led to the house they wanted. Mr. Goldy showed his L. N. A. card, and the constable allowed him and Andrew to pass up the path.

When they came to the front door, a terrible smell of gas met them. Mr. Goldy's excitement increased when he perceived that he was on the track of a real story. They pulled the bell, the door was opened by another constable, and they could see policemen in the passage and in the front room on the ground floor. Mr. Goldy was admitted to the passage, and Andrew followed him.

They soon discovered that the story had been exaggerated, but there was sufficient truth in it to make the bitter journey worth while. The house had been inhabited by an old married couple and their imbecile son, and the gas had been left turned on in the room where the old couple had slept. The old lady had succumbed to the fumes, but the old man had been taken away to the hospital, and the son was under strict supervision. Mr. Goldy begged very hard to be allowed to see the room in which the tragedy had taken place, but, to Andrew's great relief, the police would not allow this. Back they clambered into the cab, therefore, and it was after six in the morning when they found themselves once again in Fleet Street. Mr. Goldy had the bills of the evening papers all to himself for quite an hour that afternoon. Then somebody very thoughtlessly jumped into the Thames from London Bridge, and Mr. Goldy's butterfly hour was over.

Andrew was merely an onlooker during this incident, but he had learnt several useful things, among them being the art of handling cabmen, and the still greater art of talking to members of the police force. The latter of these accomplishments he found extremely useful a few weeks later.

It was a Sunday evening, and there was very little doing in the office. All the pipes were alight, and Mr. Sandford was at his merriest. Suddenly a startling piece of news came to hand. The story went that a young woman who was separated from her husband was proceeding along Brick Lane, Whitechapel, carrying her baby. The husband met her, drew a revolver, fired at her, and killed the baby. A crowd had immediately gathered, and would certainly have lynched the husband had not the police interfered and dragged him off to the station. It was this story which Mr. Sandford, with a merry twinkle in his eye, sent Andrew to investigate. Andrew had very little idea as to the whereabouts of Brick Lane, but he remembered that most of the Whitechapel murders had taken place in or about that thoroughfare. Scorning to ask any questions, therefore, he put on his hat and coat, and went out to "get the story."

A friendly constable advised him to take the Underground to Aldgate, and then walk. This Andrew did, and presently found himself at one end of the notorious Brick Lane. Imbued with the notion that the residents of Whitechapel resent the presence in their sacred district of anybody with a clean face, a clean collar, and a decent coat, he pulled his hat over his eyes, turned up the collar of his coat, and pushed his way roughly into a public-house at the corner of Brick Lane. The bar was full of somewhat startling individuals, but none of them paid much attention to Andrew until he casually asked the barmaid if she had heard anything about a murder that had been committed in the neighbourhood that evening.

"Murder?" echoed the barmaid. "No. I never 'eard anything. Did you 'ear anything about it?"

This question was addressed to a person who had neglected to shave for about a week, neglected to change his collar for about a month, and neglected to acquire any new clothes for about ten years. He was smoking a short clay pipe, and had a pint pot at his elbow.

"Murder?" he repeated in his turn. He raised the pint pot, came quite close to Andrew, replaced the pint pot on the counter, and looked very hard and long into Andrew's face. *"Murder?"* he said a second time.

The word "murder" having now been repeated three times, it was not to be wondered at that the other occupants of the bar dropped their conversations for the time being, and crowded round Andrew. He began to see pictures of himself being dragged to the ground, robbed, stabbed, and flung into the street; but he conjured up a withered smile, and said in a conciliating tone, "I daresay it's all a mistake," as who should imply that he had not the slightest desire to cast an aspersion on this beautiful and pious neighbourhood.

But the little crowd were not to be so easily cheated out of their Sunday evening sensation. They drew closer and closer yet to Andrew, until those in front had to put their hands against him in order to keep the others back. The aspect of things was distinctly threatening when a brilliant idea occurred to the young journalist. Looking over the heads of the crowd at the glass door by which he had entered, he shielded his eyes from the light with his hand, and exclaimed in an eager voice, "Is that an Inspector?"

The crowd turned to look through the glass door, leaving a little lane open.

"Yes, it is!" Andrew replied to his own question. "I must speak to him at once!" With that he dashed through the mob, gained the swing doors, and was once more safely in the street.

He wandered down Brick Lane and up again, but of course there was nothing to be learnt in that way. Presently it occurred to him that if anybody had been shot, they would be taken to the nearest hospital, so he enquired the way to the nearest hospital, and was informed that it was in Commercial Road. Andrew walked briskly along Commercial Road, up the steps of the hospital, and demanded to see the Doctor-in-charge.

What was his business with the Doctor-in-charge? Andrew beat about the bush for a little, and then took the porter into his confidence. The porter conducted him to a large book, in which were entered the names and particulars of the cases brought into the hospital that day. The number of these cases was surprising, but at last Andrew found a reference to a young woman suffering from a bullet wound. He demanded to see the young woman, but the porter smiled and shook his head. So Andrew made a mental note of the writing in the book, and hurried away to the Commercial Road Police-Station.

The door of the Police-Station stood open—Police-Stations seem to have this friendly habit in common with public-houses—and Andrew walked straight into the Charge Room. Here he found himself right on the scent of his story. A very small man, hatless, with blood on his face that came from a bad scratch,

clad in an old and ragged suit, stood there in charge of a constable. The little man, who had pronouncedly Hebraic features, seemed to be recovering from a dreadful fright; he kept casting downward glances at the pocket of his tattered jacket. Following the direction of the little man's eyes, Andrew noticed that there was a round hole in the pocket, which looked as though it had been burnt through with a jet of flame.

"It was lucky fer you," the constable was saying, "that me and my mate came up just when we did."

The little man looked at the constable with round, mournful eyes. Then he looked down again at his scorched pocket.

"Another minute," went on the constable, "and they'd 'ave done yer in."

The little man raised his sad eyes to the eyes of the healthy constable.

"I never see a lot of folks so mad," said the constable. "What did yer want ter go and do it for?"

The little man shook his head and looked down at his maimed pocket.

"You must 'ave 'ad a reason," pursued the constable.

The little man again looked up into the face of his questioner, and again he shook his head.

"Well, if yer won't explain, I suppose yer won't explain."

The little man still shook his head. Then, quite suddenly, he blurted out: "It went off in me 'and."

"What's that?" snapped the constable.

"It went off in me 'and," repeated the little man. "I never meant ter go and do it. I never meant ter 'urt 'er. We was talking, and all of a sudden it went off in me 'and. Is she a gorner?"

"Not yet," replied the constable, "but she may be by the morning."

On receipt of this intelligence, the little man again looked down at the hole in his pocket, again gave his head a mournful shake, and again looked up at the healthy constable. It was a look that seemed to say, "I know I'm in your hands. I know what the police are, and what they can do to me. I can't get away unless you want to let me go. It's no use my saying anything. You'll do just whatever you think you will, and I can't prevent it."

It was at this juncture that the constable noticed Andrew standing near the doorway observing the scene. He stepped forward with some brusqueness and asked the visitor what he wanted.

"Is that the man who did the shooting?" asked Andrew.

"What shooting?" answered the constable.

"Is that the man who shot the woman who's now in the Commercial Road Hospital?"

"What 'ave you got ter do with it?"

"I'm from the newspapers."

"What newspapers?"

"All the newspapers. I represent a news agency. Here is my card. A report was brought in that a man had shot at a woman and killed a baby. I've been sent down to investigate it. We want to get the right report into the papers, and not the wrong one. There's sure to be a report in the papers, so you may as well have it correct as not."

The constable pondered for a moment over this knotty problem, and then told Andrew he had better step through into the next room and speak to the In-

spector. Andrew did so. The Inspector was sitting at a high desk, busily writing. It seemed to Andrew that Inspectors were always writing. At any rate, he had never seen an Inspector who was not writing. He wondered what on earth they wrote, and why they didn't write a play or a novel while they were about it.

"Good evening," he said cheerily to the Inspector.

The Inspector looked up from his writing, glanced at Andrew over his glasses, inspected him as only an Inspector can inspect, and then replied in a gruff, unwilling voice, "Good evening."

"I have come here," explained Andrew glibly, "as the representative of the Lightning News Agency. You have probably heard of our agency; we supply most of the news to all the papers." Here he paused to note the effect of this paralysing information on the official mind.

"Well?" said the Inspector.

"We received a report about a very serious shooting case. We were told that a man fired at a woman, missed the woman, and killed a baby that she was carrying. Is that the man in the next room?"

"I can't answer any questions," said the Inspector.

"Well, look here, you know, we're bound to send something about this to the papers, and we don't want to get a garbled version of it. If you wouldn't mind just giving me the facts, I'll see that the papers print them correctly. Is that the man in the next room?"

"It might be," said the Inspector.

"Thank you."

"Mind, I'm not telling you anything."

"I quite understand. Did he kill the baby?"

"There was no baby killed that I know anything about."

"Oh." There was distinct disappointment in Andrew's tone. A journalist on the track of a good story has no room for human sentiments. "Then there was nobody killed?"

"You must go away," said the Inspector. "I've told you before that I can't answer any questions."

"I've been to the hospital," said Andrew pleasantly, "and I found that a young woman was taken in there suffering from a bullet wound. I suppose that would be the same young woman?"

"It might be," said the Inspector.

"Thank you."

"Mind, I'm not telling you anything."

"I quite understand. . . . That chap in there seems to be worried about a hole in his pocket. Did he shoot at the woman through his pocket?"

"I don't say he did, and I don't say he didn't. It might have happened like that. That's as much as I can say. Now you must be off."

"Thank you. It might have happened by accident, eh?"

"He says it happened by accident. That's all I can tell you. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," said Andrew. . . . "Did the crowd go for him?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"Oh, I don't know. Only he looks as if he'd been mauled about a bit."

"Well," replied the Inspector, who parted with every shred of information as reluctantly as a sulky parrot,

"if you go firing off pistols in the street, and if a ball out of your pistol happens to hit a young woman, and if that young woman has friends in the neighbourhood, it's quite likely that her friends will give you a bit of a jacketing, isn't it? Now you must be off."

"Thank you," said Andrew.

"Mind, I've not told you anything."

"I quite understand that. Just one more thing. What was the motive?"

"I didn't say there was a motive."

"No, but he must have known the woman beforehand. Was she his wife?"

"Might have been. I don't say she was, and I don't say she wasn't. They might have been living apart, and just happened to meet in the street. Now you must be off."

"Thank you. Goodnight."

"Goodnight. And mind," added the Inspector, as Andrew moved towards the door, "I haven't told you anything whatever."

"That's perfectly understood," replied Andrew, and then he passed once again through the outer room, where the healthy young constable was still towering over his prey, and the little man was still looking from the constable to his wounded pocket, and from the pocket back to the constable.

Andrew returned with all possible speed to the offices of the Lightning News Agency. Everybody looked up with interest as he entered. They were naturally anxious to know how he had fared in his first enquiry.

"Did you get anything?" asked Mr. Sandford.

"Yes," said Andrew, hanging up his coat and hat.

"Will it make a story?"

"Yes, I think it will make a very good story."

"Anybody killed?" enquired Mr. Sandford, with more interest than he had yet shown in the affair.

"No, nobody actually killed, but the woman may die during the night. The man shot her through his pocket. The woman is his wife, and they have been living apart. They met in the street by accident, and I suppose they had a row. I've seen the man; he's a little Jew. I went to the hospital and tried to see the woman, but they wouldn't let me. The most interesting part of the business is that the crowd tried to lynch the man, and the police had some difficulty in saving him."

"What about the baby?" enquired Mr. Sandford.

"Oh, there was nothing in that. She may have been carrying a baby, but there was no mention of it in the hospital book. I expect that was invention."

"All right," said Mr. Sandford. "Make what you can of it, but don't be too lengthy. There's been a lot of stuff in since you went."

Andrew sat down and wrote out his story. Picturesque details came crowding into his head, and he found it difficult to repress them, but he knew that they were not suitable for the staid columns of the London morning newspapers of that day. The story was quickly despatched, and next morning he had the pleasure of reading on some of the bills of the more "human" papers:

"ATTEMPT TO LYNCH A JEW IN WHITECHAPEL"

Still he heard nothing from Mr. Pincumbe with regard to the promised appointment to the staff. He had

now been more than six months in the office of the Lightning News Agency, and had done his utmost to win some sign of recognition from the Manager. He had spared neither his time nor his brains nor his energies; and yet no sign came.

"Dodge," said Mr. Inchboard. "Old dodge. Tried it on me. Try it on everybody. Keep you up to the mark. Keep you waiting. Keep you guessing. Don't you stand it. Write to him. Write a sharp note. Demand a position on the staff. Have a beer?"

Andrew had almost made up his mind to the reckless step of writing to the Manager, when the wheel of his Fortune took another turn. Looking through an evening paper during an interval of slackness at the office, he came across a paragraph to the effect that the Editor and Assistant-Editor of a weekly paper called "The Studio" had resigned their posts in order to found another weekly paper, and that the place of the Editor had been offered to and accepted by Mr. George Baradale. There was no mention of the new Assistant-Editor.

Now, of all the papers in London, "The Studio" was the one upon which Andrew had set his desires from a very early age. It was an illustrated weekly paper, literary, theatrical, and artistic. It was a very popular paper at Oxford, and Andrew had once or twice succeeded in getting little sets of verses and little dialogues printed in its columns. He did not know Mr. George Baradale, but he set his wits to work wondering how he could secure an immediate interview with this well-known personage. The post of Assistant-Editor was probably filled, but the chance, however slight, ought not to be neglected.

He walked home in the early morning hours with his mind full of the problem. Some mysterious force urged him on. A mad notion kept flitting through his head that, in some way or another, his fate was to be bound up with this appointment of Mr. George Baradale to the Editorship of "The Studio." He had no reason to hope, and yet he did hope—wildly, foolishly, tumultuously.

On his table lay a letter from Sylvia. He opened it at once, of course, but his brain was still working on the problem of "The Studio." Sylvia's letter was much the same as usual. She congratulated him on his continued success, and urged him to pay them a visit at the first opportunity. But there was one little piece of news that seemed to be linked up with Andrew's train of thought.

"Who do you think is coming to open the Bazaar in aid of the Church Restoration?" she wrote. "You would never guess! Mona Swinhoe! Isn't it fun! You really ought to run down to the Bazaar, and then you could meet her, and she might be able to give you some useful introductions. I am sure she would take a tremendous fancy to you. How could she help it?"

Andrew sat holding the letter and staring into the dead fire. Mona Swinhoe was a novelist who had just leapt into fame. If he could secure an authorised snapshot of the lady, and an interview with her, would not that be a fitting introduction to the new Editor of "The Studio?" The date of the Bazaar was the following Tuesday. Monday was his night off.

He jumped up, and seized an old A.B.C. time-table.

CHAPTER XI

A WILD JOURNEY TO WARWICKSHIRE, AND THE TREMENDOUS RESULT

MR. SANDFORD, who was the personification of good-nature, raised no objection to Andrew's suggestion that he should work on the Monday night and take the Tuesday night off instead. Leaving the office, therefore, at two o'clock precisely on the morning of the day set apart for the Bazaar, Andrew lay down upon his bed for three hours, and then caught the six-thirty train for Warwickshire and Sylvia.

It was said, in the last century, that the advent of the railway train had killed romance. People accustomed to the picturesque stage-coach could not imagine a lover welcoming a lover on the prosaic platform of a grimy railway-station. Nothing less romantic for them than the distant bend of a road or the summit of a distant hill backed by the setting sun. They should have seen Sylvia as she waited that clear September morning for the six-thirty from Paddington. . . .

To the casual eye she was just the same Sylvia as ever, but Andrew noticed the difference in a flash. Her face was a little thinner, and her cheeks a little paler, and her eyes a little more resolute. Whilst Andrew had been up and down the great world, hammer-

ing some sort of a living out of it, Sylvia had remained at home with her mother in the quiet Warwickshire village; but the sufferings of inaction are often less tolerable than the actual blows received in the fight for life. Andrew had starved, but Sylvia had starved with him. Andrew had known humiliation, but Sylvia had known the humiliation of helplessness. Andrew had won through the hottest of the fight, but Sylvia had neither part nor lot in the victory.

And she, on her side, saw a change in him. He, too, looked paler and thinner; he, too, had resolution in his eyes that was not there when he went away. He had not aged very much in physique; he was still a mere boy; but the soul of a man had begun to look out of those boyish eyes. With something very like a pang, Sylvia realised that he was not the same Andrew who had left her to go to London. There was now a great gap between them. Patient waiting had added little to her store of knowledge; it was his added knowledge that divided them.

Of course they instinctively hid, or tried to hide, their thoughts from each other. They smiled very brightly, and laughed at the first excuse, and pretended that everything was just as it used to be in the dear old days. Sylvia had driven herself to the station in her little pony-trap, and as soon as they were alone in a shady lane, Andrew drew her to him and kissed her. Sylvia submitted to the kiss, but she did not return it. She just touched up the pony and drove on.

"And when does the Great Personage arrive?" asked Andrew.

"Oh, she is going to motor over from Eastwood, and

will be at the Park at three-thirty. Isn't it exciting? You must be extremely nice to her, Andrew, and I'm sure she'll take a great fancy to you and be very helpful."

"D'you think she'll let me take a snapshot of her for 'The Studio?'"

"Extremely unlikely."

"Well, d'you think she'll give me an interview? I want it most particularly."

"You might try, but they say she thinks that interviews are vulgar."

"That depends on how they are done," explained Andrew with the loftiness of the London journalist in the country. "There are interviews and interviews. I should do a sort of impressionist sketch, and not the usual question and answer."

"I suppose you realise," said Sylvia, "that the speech she will make this afternoon when she opens this Bazaar is the first speech she has ever made in her life?"

"What?" cried Andrew.

"It's her maiden speech. She said so in her letter to the Rector."

"By Jove! That's a scoop! Will there be reporters present?"

"Oh, yes, there'll be reporters from Eastwood, and perhaps from Birmingham."

"Dash it! They'll spoil the whole bag of tricks."

Mrs. Kesterton was lying on a sofa, and Andrew, although he was prepared by Sylvia's letters for a change in her, was quite shocked at her appearance. The poor lady looked very frail, but her customary optimism still prevailed.

"Ah, Andrew, my dear, here you are! What a long time it seems since you went away! They say it's a rolling stone that gathers no moss, but Sylvia tells me that you've begun to gather some moss at last; I'm so glad. I always told you that every cloud had a silver lining, but young people find it difficult to believe these things when they are in trouble. Sylvia was just the same; she used to worry dreadfully about you at first, but I think I convinced her at last that the night is darkest before dawn. I bought the oak sideboard out of your father's dining-room—but you were here for the sale, weren't you?"

"I'm so sorry not to find you at your best," faltered Andrew, feeling it as difficult to express his sympathy as young men always do in such cases.

"Oh, but I don't know that I'm not at my best. I'm very weak, and I can't bustle about and look after the house as I used to do, but see what a chance it is for Sylvia? She's becoming quite a clever little housekeeper now that she has to look after the servants and everything. Depend upon it, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. I feel much more comfortable in my mind about Sylvia now that I've seen her turn her hand to practical things. And now tell me all about yourself. Have you got nice rooms? Is your landlady a good cook? Does she mend your clothes properly, and keep everything clean? Do you take care of your health? I must know all about it, because I feel like a sort of mother to you, you know. Don't keep anything back. I shall be sure to see through you if you try to do that."

So Andrew sat by her side and told her such of the adventures recounted in this story as he thought would

amuse her. At the end of an hour, Sylvia brought a little tray and placed it by her mother, and then she and Andrew went into the dining-room. It was strange, this first meal alone together, and made Andrew hate the thought of his dingy apartments and the vulgar, noisy restaurants where he was forced to take most of his meals. Wild schemes shot through his brain for removing Sylvia and Mrs. Kesterton to some charming house on the outskirts of London, where they could all be together—and this brought him back to the coming meeting with Mona Swinhoe. That was the next step. Somehow or other, everything seemed to depend on that.

They left Mrs. Kesterton peacefully dozing, and walked up together to the Park. The band was playing, flags were flying, dozens of people stepped forward to welcome Andrew after his long absence. He saw nothing but friendly faces, and smiling eyes, and outstretched hands.

They strolled through the various tents, and inspected the "Art Needlework," and the flowers, and the fruit, and the vegetables, and the eggs, and the mushrooms, and even took a little peep into the tent that was to screen the fortune-teller from the mere world of things as they were.

At last a murmur of excitement ran through the sauntering crowd; a big motor-car swept up the drive and stopped in front of the tents. Out of it stepped a pretty little lady, with pink cheeks and blue eyes. She was attended by a much larger lady, who stood in front of the celebrity whenever a camera was levelled at her. This, apparently, was the large lady's *raison d'être*.

The Rector received Miss Mona Swinhoe with due ceremony, and conducted her to a platform, from whence she delivered her maiden speech. It was quite a pretty little speech, neatly phrased and well-balanced, with an amusing reference to the mice who, quite uninvited, attended Divine Service through the holes in the floor. Amid the applause that followed, she stepped down from the platform, and the Rector promptly introduced Andrew, much to his embarrassment, as "another worker in the field of letters." Andrew suggested a cup of tea, and was soon walking away to a shady corner with the great Mona Swinhoe on his arm. If only the Night Editorial of the Lightning News Agency could have seen him then!

"And now tell me about yourself," said the little lady. "What sort of things do you write? And where do you write them?"

"Oh," stammered Andrew, "the things I write are not worth talking about. I've never written a book. I only write little articles, and stories, and things of that sort. I'm on the Editorial staff of the Lightning News Agency, you know."

"The Lightning News Agency? What's that?"

"Well, it's a sort of place where they collect news and send it out to the newspapers."

The little celebrity turned her blue eyes on the boy, and something in his face seemed to please her. She smiled graciously, and rested the tip of her fan upon his hand.

"Do you know," she said, "that you have a very great responsibility? A great statesman said to me, when he paid me the honour of taking tea with me at my house, 'As a woman, you are pretty and good;

as a writer, be brave and true. God bless you, my dear child! Be brave! You have got a great future before you. Don't lose heart on the way!' and I say the same to you. But I also add, 'Never write unkindly about a woman, or about any work done by a woman!' We women have enough to contend with in this world, God knows, without men using their cruel strength against us!"

Andrew wanted very much to introduce the subject of a snapshot and an interview, but he did not quite know how to bring the conversation down to the right level. He was still puzzling over the best way to accomplish this feat, when the Rector came panting up to take Miss Mona Swinhoe the round of the stalls. Andrew anathematised him for a tactless ass, and then went off to search for Sylvia.

That was the only chance he had of a conversation with the famous novelist, but he made the most of it. Discarding the idea of a snapshot, as she seemed to have such a definite objection to anything of the kind, he sat down in his bedroom that evening, and wrote a little article entitled "MONA SWINHOE'S MAIDEN SPEECH." He described the setting—the rural Bazaar, the local dignitaries, the quiet tents, the humble villagers. He gave as much of the speech as he could remember with the help of his notes, and then he drew a little pen-portrait of this much talked of and little known personality.

As soon as he arrived in London the following day, he had his article typewritten, put it into his pocket, and called at the offices of "The Studio." Mr. George Baradale was engaged, but would see him if he cared to wait. Andrew replied that he would wait. He

did not mention the fact to the messenger-boy, but he would have waited all day, and then slept on the floor of the waiting-room, rather than miss the chance of meeting Mr. Baradale.

At the end of half-an-hour or so, he was conducted into the presence of the new Editor of "The Studio." Mr. Baradale was an elderly man, with white beard and whiskers, and a gravely courteous manner. He waved Andrew to a chair, and bent his full attention upon the visitor. Mr. Baradale never did things by halves. If you were fortunate enough to catch his ear, you caught the whole of it, and not the extreme tip of one lobe.

"I think I have brought you something rather interesting," Andrew began.

Mr. Baradale bowed. "That's good. We're always open to consider interesting things for 'The Studio.' What is the nature of it? A photograph?"

"No, it isn't a photograph. It's Miss Mona Swinhoe's maiden speech, delivered yesterday at a bazaar which she opened in Warwickshire. I happened to be present, and I made a note of the speech, thinking it would be the very thing for 'The Studio.'"

"So it would have been," replied Mr. Baradale, "but I'm afraid you were anticipated. A verbatim report of the speech appears in this afternoon's 'Westminster Gazette.'"

Andrew looked very blank. He had known that there were to be reporters from Birmingham, but it had not occurred to him that they would telegraph the speech to the London papers.

"May I look at it?" he asked.

"Certainly." Mr. Baradale handed him the paper.

"But this is so bald!" he exclaimed. "They've got nothing but the mere speech. I've got a pen-portrait of Miss Swinhoe made at first hand."

Mr. Baradale was at once interested. "Oh, have you? Let me look it through, will you?"

Andrew gave the Editor his little article, and then endured the agony, possible only to a young writer in a similar position, of having to watch another person reading his work and to wait for the verdict.

"Excellent!" pronounced Mr. Baradale. "And so you have the privilege of a personal acquaintance with Miss Swinhoe?"

"I never met her until yesterday. I heard from a friend that she was to open this bazaar, and it occurred to me that, if I could get an interview with her, it might serve as a means of introduction to you. So I went down. It isn't an interview, because she objects to interviews, but nobody could object to a report of the speech with a few notes on the setting."

Mr. Baradale seemed more and more interested.

"Do you really mean, Mr. Dick, that you went all the way to Warwickshire and back in order to obtain this means of introduction to me?"

"Yes," said Andrew.

"That seems very enterprising, not to say flattering. Why didn't you simply call at the office and send in your card?"

"Well, you see, I didn't know whether that would be sufficient. I knew that my name would be quite strange to you, and I wanted to show you, besides, what I could do."

"I see. You wish to become a contributor to 'The Studio'?"

Now for it! Andrew steeled himself for a speech of unparalleled audacity.

"I wish to become Assistant-Editor of 'The Studio.' . . ."

Was it possible that Mr. Baradale was considering the idea? Andrew hardly breathed as he watched the face of the man who had it in his power to make him the happiest living mortal. An hour passed in silence —a day—a week—a month—a year—five years—ten years—a lifetime—an eternity! In reality, the time that elapsed before Mr. Baradale replied was about three seconds.

"How did you know," he asked, studying Andrew more intently than ever, "that I was in need of an Assistant-Editor? Did anybody mention it to you?"

"No. I saw an announcement in a paper that you had been appointed to the Editorship, but there was no mention of any Assistant-Editor. 'The Studio' has always been my favourite paper, and I have occasionally contributed to its columns."

"When was that?" asked Mr. Baradale.

"When I was at——" Andrew drew back on the very edge of the precipice. Another hundredth part of a second, and he would have mentioned the one word that (as he thought) would have ruined the barest possible chance he might now have of securing the appointment. "A year or two ago," he substituted.

"When you were at——?" persisted Mr. Baradale, with a gentle smile.

"Floodington," said Andrew. "I've been in a school at Floodington."

"Oh, I see. And your contributions were sent in from Floodington?"

"Yes." Andrew was sorry to lay the possible foundation of his fortune on a lie, but there was no help for it.

"Have you any cuttings of your work with you?"

"Oh, yes!" Andrew dived into an inner pocket, and produced a specially assorted sample. There was nothing about Oxford in any of the cuttings, and nothing of a serious nature. There were one or two criticisms of plays written for Oxford papers, and there were little sets of verses, and little dialogues, and one or two light descriptive articles. Mr. Baradale read them through very carefully, entirely ignoring the long line of messenger-boys that had assembled in the passage without. When he had finished, he handed them back to Andrew with the remark, "Very bright—very bright and clever. And what are you doing at the present moment, Mr. Dick?"

Andrew explained that he was a sub-editor on the Night Editorial of the Lightning News Agency, adding hastily that he was not on the regular staff, and was therefore free to leave at a week's notice.

"It is quite true," said Mr. Baradale at last, "that I am looking for a young man to assist me in the Editorial department of this paper, and you seem to be very much the sort of young man for whom I am looking." (Andrew nearly swooned.) "But I must tell you, Mr. Dick, that the editing of an illustrated weekly paper is not nearly so easy as it looks. The inexperienced person, taking up a copy of 'The Studio,' sees a certain amount of reading matter, and a certain number of photographs and drawings. To such a per-

son, it would seem a pretty easy task to bring out this paper each week, and he would probably suppose that the work could all be done in a couple of days. I can assure you that this is very far from being the case. For one photograph or drawing that you see in the paper, at least ninety-nine have been rejected. That will give you some idea of the number of photographs that have to be inspected, and very carefully inspected, every day of the week. If we didn't look at every photograph that came into the office, we might miss something of extraordinary interest, which would find its way to a rival paper. If that happened, my Directors would naturally want to know why that photograph had found its way into a rival paper instead of into 'The Studio.'

"Then there are a large number of drawings to be considered, and articles, and stories. There are proofs to be read, and pages to be made up, and callers to be interviewed. We have to be constantly in the front; 'The Studio' must never take second place. Whatever there is going of interest to our readers, we must cover it, and we must cover it in the best and brightest possible way. Now, just consider all the matters of interest that are occurring, not only in London, but all over the country and all over the world at this moment, and then you will see how very quick, and experienced, and hard-working the Editorial staff must be if 'The Studio' is to beat all its rivals out of the field each week.

"At present, I'm working without an assistant, chiefly because I've found it extremely difficult to pitch upon the right man. Some know too much,

others know nothing at all. Some are lazy, others are too energetic—in their own interests. Some are too finicking to be of any use in any newspaper office whatsoever, whilst others are obviously not in touch with the type of reader to whom we appeal. And so, Mr. Dick, although I didn't even know of your existence half-an-hour ago, I'm disposed to give you a trial—not a regular and definite appointment, you understand, but merely a trial."

Andrew stammered out a few broken words of gratitude. He tried to say that he would devote himself night and day to the interests of the paper, but the right words completely failed him, and he felt that he was making a horrible mess of it.

"Wait a moment," Mr. Baradale advised him. "You have to consider your position on the Lightning News Agency, Mr. Dick. These positions in Fleet Street are not easily come by, and, whatever your salary may be, and whatever the nature of your work may be, I ought to warn you not to give up that position without very careful consideration. I hope that, if you came to me for three months on trial, I should find you a very valuable assistant in every way; on the other hand, I might find you quite the reverse, and then you would have lost your berth on the Lightning News Agency as well as your post here."

"I'll risk it," said Andrew promptly.

Mr. Baradale smiled: "If you'll take my advice," he said, "you'll sleep on it, Mr. Dick. Leave your cuttings with me, and I'll look them through again at my leisure. I must also drop a line to your present Chief, and I must think things over myself. Then, if every-

thing seems satisfactory, and you are still willing to take the risk, come and see me the day after tomorrow at three o'clock. Good afternoon."

Mr. Baradale rose, shook Andrew very warmly by the hand, and bowed him out into the passage, which was now so crowded with messenger-boys and other people waiting to see Mr. Baradale that he could hardly force his way through. There were men looking anxious and hurried; these were photographers, who wanted to be off with their wares to the next office. There were men leaning carelessly against the wall smoking cigarettes; these were artists, who had the whole night before them now that the working light for the day was gone. There were one or two middle-aged ladies with compressed lips; these were press-agents, who hoped to persuade Mr. Baradale to publish the portrait of some young actress in "The Studio." The photographers scowled at Andrew, and the artists smiled at him, and the press-agents compressed their lips at him; but Andrew saw none of them. He saw nothing but a splendid avenue, moss-carpeted, lighted with gleams of gold, the entrance to which was on the other side of a wide and deep ravine labelled

TWO DAYS

Mr. Baradale had advised him to sleep on it. Good Heavens, what a suggestion! He plunged out of the Strand down to the Embankment, and paced along by the side of the river, wondering what he could do to help forward his Chance. The delay was maddening! The uncertainty was enough to drive him crazy! Was

there no string that he could pull, no lever that he could work, to improve this wonderful, this glorious, this unique Chance?

On the morning of the second day his suspense ended. He received a letter from Mr. Baradale, offering him the post of Assistant-Editor of "The Studio" on three months' probation, at a salary more than double the one he was at present receiving, and payment at the usual rates for anything that he might write in the paper.

At the offices of the Lightning News Agency the news of Andrew's good fortune was received with astonished smiles and a few criticisms. Mr. Sandford, Mr. Lenney, and Mr. Inchboard were ungrudging in their congratulations. Mr. Pincumbe, in reply to Andrew's written notice, said that he did not recognise Mr. Dick's right to leave the service of the Lightning News Agency at a week's notice, but, since he evidently wished to do so, for some preposterous reason which he would undoubtedly live to repent, Mr. Pincumbe would not stand in his way.

Mr. Eyeslip, Mr. Bradbury, and Mr. Goldy uttered criticisms which rather hurt Andrew at the time, although, in the course of years, he became extremely familiar with them. Mr. Eyeslip said, "Some men have all the luck," and then went on with his work. Mr. Bradbury observed, "Well, Mr. Dick, I congratulate you on having been born with a silver spoon in your mouth." Mr. Goldy expressed much the same opinion in slightly different words. "This just shows," said Mr. Goldy, "the value of having an Oxford career at your back."

Andrew neither protested nor explained. Who shall say that he had not developed since he first came to London and took that magnificent apartment in the large hotel by the river?

CHAPTER XII

ANDREW LUNCHES AT THE ALHAMBRA HOTEL WITH AN EPICUREAN PUBLISHER

MOST men, in looking back over their careers, like to put a finger on a certain event, and say, "That was the turning-point of my fortunes." When Andrew has time to look back over his career, he will probably select, as the turning-point of his fortunes, not the morning upon which he told the examiners in Honour Theology that Isaiah alluded to the Arabians as being distinguished for the excellence of their cavalry; not the morning when he took breakfast with Mr. Theophilus Crichton and Mr. Leviticus Foottit; not the forenoon when he dared to show the great Plumbridge that he had a soul of his own; not the afternoon of the same day when he found himself in a cell at Night Street; not the meeting next morning with Mr. Inchboard; not the day when he yielded to the blandishments of young Mr. Petch and accepted the invitation to spend a thoroughly jolly term at Floodington; not his introduction to those brilliant conversationalists, the Weevill family; not his conversation under the old Warwickshire elms with the beautiful and celebrated Miss Mona Swinhoe; and not even the afternoon when he managed to make a good impression upon Mr. George Baradale.

Important as were all these links in the chain, they

led but to a certain point, namely, the longed-for footing in Fleet Street. The event upon which he will probably place his finger, because it opened up to him a wider sphere, is the day when he received the following letter:

Paternoster Row.
May 7th, 19—.

ANDREW DICK ESQ.,
Offices of "The Studio."
Dear Sir,

If you will do me the honour of lunching with me at the Alhambra Hotel on Thursday next at 1.30, I have a suggestion to make to you which I think will interest you.

Yours sincerely,
CECIL PUNT.

Andrew accepted the invitation. He had by this time been Assistant-Editor of "The Studio" for two years; two very happy and quite prosperous years. He had found Mr. Baradale the most kindly and generous of Editors. It had never been necessary for Andrew to hint that he would like to write for "The Studio"; Mr. Baradale had been almost embarrassing in his demands for contributions from Andrew's pen. The Editor had even given him a page to himself, wherein Andrew might write each week an article in his own light vein on some topic of the moment. These articles were illustrated by a well-known black-and-white artist, and, in due course, a number of them, together with the illustrations, had been bound and issued to the world at the price of one shilling. This little volume, unimportant though the world considered it, was of very great importance to Andrew. Not only was it his first book—and the thrill he experienced on seeing his name on the title-page of a

real book for the first time is one of the memories of his lifetime—but it was also the means of bringing him the invitation from Mr. Cecil Punt.

Mr. Punt, a few years previous to this date, had arrived at one bound in the very centre of the bewildered publishing world. He was a very able young man, very enterprising, very alert, very cool, very sleek. Obviously, therefore, there was nothing to keep Mr. Punt from obtaining a very great position indeed—always provided that he published the right books. Mr. Punt himself was quite sure that he would always publish the right books, for the simple reason that he knew precisely what the reading public wanted to read. He proved that he knew what the reading public wanted to read by publishing several books that the reading public did read; in point of fact, Mr. Punt was being looked upon with no little awe, mingled with a wholesome amount of trepidation, at the time when he singled out Mr. Andrew Dick and invited him to lunch with him at the Alhambra.

Andrew, to tell the truth, had never been inside the Alhambra Hotel in his life. He had often dined with Mr. Baradale, both at public banquets, to which they were invited in their official capacities, and also at a little restaurant in Soho where Mr. Baradale was very well known, and of which he was exceedingly fond. But the public banquets were not held at the Alhambra, and Andrew, being at heart a modest youth, had never summoned up sufficient courage to push his way into this gorgeous place and demand food.

When he arrived at the hotel, carefully shaved and dressed, an appallingly splendid flunkey, who

actually condescended to speak and move as though he were one-tenth human, informed Andrew that Mr. Punt had already arrived, and was awaiting him in the restaurant. Two other flunkeys stepped forward, one making himself responsible for Andrew's hat, and the second assuming sole charge of Andrew's stick. They had the air of men who, having undertaken a solemn and laborious duty, would not lightly shrink from the task. Andrew then followed a fourth flunkey into the restaurant. His ideas were expanding as rapidly as a soap bubble at the end of a clay pipe.

Mr. Punt rose to greet him with a charming smile and outstretched hand.

"I hope," was almost his first remark, "that you like snails, Mr. Dick?"

Andrew confessed, with a feeling of shame, that he had never eaten a snail in his life. He had often seen snails slowly climbing the walls in his father's garden, but it had never occurred to him to take them into the kitchen and have them cooked.

"Then the sooner you begin," said Mr. Punt, "the more time you will have to remedy that omission. I've ordered snails because I wanted to give you a special treat. If you don't like them, just pass them along to me. They're one of the passions of my life."

Since Mr. Punt made such a point of the delicacy, Andrew felt bound to do his duty by them. Watching Mr. Punt very carefully, then, he dug the fork provided for that purpose into the snail, withdrew it from its shell, and made an attempt, genuinely heroic under the circumstances, to swallow it.

"How d'you like it?" asked Mr. Punt, himself revelling.

"I'm awfully sorry," said Andrew, "but I think it's simply beastly."

"They may be an acquired taste, but I assure you the taste is worth acquiring. However, don't you bother with them if you'd rather not. Just hand them over here."

Whilst Mr. Punt was polishing off Andrew's portion of snails, Andrew looked about him, and fancied that he could recognise several of the eminent ladies and gentlemen whose portraits had been published in the pages of "The Studio." They did not look quite so fresh as their portraits, but there they were, all alive and eating, and it was very nice to feel that he was moving in what the society papers call the "great world." He made up his mind that Mr. Cecil Punt must be a very prosperous young man, especially when, the lunch being over, and a move made to the lounge for coffee and cigarettes, Mr. Punt carelessly told the waiter to put the amount of his bill to his account.

"Now," began Mr. Punt, when they were comfortably settled under the leaf of a huge palm, with coffee and liqueurs on a little table between them, and a band playing American music at the back of their heads, "I'll tell you why I asked you to meet me here."

"What?" shouted Andrew, for they were so near the band that he had hardly heard three words of Mr. Punt's speech.

"I said," bellowed Mr. Punt, "that I would now tell you why I asked you to meet me here!"

"Oh!" yelled Andrew.

"What?" shrieked Mr. Punt.

"I only said, 'Oh!'" bellowed Andrew.

"Oh! . . . It is rather noisy here, isn't it?"

"What?"

"I say, it's rather noisy here!"

"Very! D'you understand lip-reading?"

"What?"

"I say, d'you understand lip-reading?"

Mr. Punt laughed, and they postponed their conversation until the end of the tune.

"Now we can get to business," said Mr. Punt, speaking very rapidly lest the band should begin again. "I've been reading your little book, and I want you to write a book for me. Is there any reason why you shouldn't?"

"I don't know of any reason," replied Andrew, rather puzzled.

"I mean, have you any contract with another publisher?"

"No, I've no contract at all."

"Good. Then I'll tell you the sort of book I want you to write. I want a humorous book, but it must be really funny. It must be so funny that everybody will be laughing over it, and everybody will be talking about it. It must be quite simply written, but full of funny situations and jolly humanity. It must be not more than fifty thousand words in length, and I shall publish it at three-and-sixpence. I shall have it illustrated by one of the best black-and-white artists of the day. It will be lavishly illustrated—about a million drawings. I shall advertise the book enormously—sandwichmen all up and down the streets,

the whole of the front page of the 'Daily Mail,' huge chunks in all the other papers, everything!

"But there are two conditions. I must buy the book outright for a lump sum down; that's the first condition. And the second condition is that I must have the first refusal of your two succeeding books. It's only fair that if I make your name for you I get some benefit out of it after it is made. Now, what sum will you want me to pay you for writing such a book as I have described? Don't hurry. Take your time. Think it well over."

The band played another tune, during which Andrew thought the offer well over. As soon as the tune was finished, he turned to Mr. Punt and said: "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't do it."

Mr. Punt gleamed at him very hard indeed through his monocle.

"Why d'you say you can't do it? D'you realise that you're turning up your nose at an offer that at least a thousand authors would jump at?"

"Yes, I quite realise that, but I'm afraid I can't accept it, all the same."

"Well, you're a very extraordinary young man. I should like to know your objection."

"That's quite simple. If I write this book, and you advertise it enormously, I shall come before the public as a humorous writer. Once a humorous writer, always a humorous writer. I've seen it happen even in my short experience, and I don't want it to happen to me. I don't want to be a humorous writer all my life, and the public won't let you be serious if you make your name with a humorous book. I'm very flattered, of course, that you should have made me the

offer, and I need hardly say that I'm very much tempted to accept it, but I made up my mind on certain points before I ever came to London, and that's one of them."

Mr. Punt removed his monocle, polished it with great deliberation, fixed it again in his eye, and suddenly flashed it at Andrew.

"If you'll allow me to say so, Mr. Dick, you're talking the greatest nonsense I ever heard in my life. Have you ever heard of 'The Pickwick Papers'? Who wrote those? Charles Dickens. Very well. Did Charles Dickens go on writing Pickwick Papers all his life? Did the public turn up their noses at 'The Old Curiosity Shop,' and 'David Copperfield,' and 'Barnaby Rudge,' and 'A Tale of Two Cities'? Did they insist that Dickens should never be pathetic? Why, good gracious, Dickens's pathos contributed as much to his success as his humour. And that's the greatest combination you can possibly have—pathos and humour."

"But you want me to be funny all the time," argued Andrew.

"No, I don't. I want you to be funny nearly all the time. You can drop in a little touch of pathos now and again, if you like. I don't mind. I'll chuck that in. You won't do it well because your're not old enough, and bad pathos is almost as sickening as bad humour; but if you're so set on being sad, my dear boy, why, be sad, and be happy! But you must limit the amount. I can't have you slopping over with your pathos all up and down the pages. You must use it sparingly. Well, what d'you say?"

Crash! Bang! Crash! The band was at it again,

and they had to smoke their cigarettes in silence for five minutes. That five minutes had a marked effect on Andrew. The introduction of the name of Dickens had done the trick for Mr. Punt. Before the band had played its final screaming blast, he had decided to write the book.

"Good," said Mr. Punt. "Now with regard to terms. How much d'you want? Straight sale, you understand. I do just what I please with the book—serialise it, or dramatise it, or publish it in America, or sell the Continental rights—any mortal thing. How much d'you want?"

Out of his first little book, Andrew had made precisely ten pounds—apart, that is to say, from the amount received week by week for the articles in "The Studio." The book itself had brought him in ten pounds. If Mr. Cecil Punt had invited him to his office, and there brought forward the proposition for this book, Andrew would probably have mentioned some comparatively modest amount. But the splendour of the Alhambra Hotel, and the luxury of snails in their shells, had fired his imagination and whetted his appetite. Assuming, therefore, as casual an air as he could contrive, he flicked the ash from his cigarette on to the carpet of the Alhambra Hotel, and replied:

"Two hundred and fifty pounds."

"Too much," said Mr. Punt, almost before the words were out of Andrew's mouth. In point of fact, Mr. Punt spoke so quickly that one might almost have thought that he had made up his mind to say "too much" before hearing Andrew's demand.

"That's the price," said Andrew.

"Can't be done."

"Then it's off."

"Give you two hundred—take it or leave it."

"Take it," said Andrew.

Mr. Punt was as good as his word. The book *was* lavishly illustrated by a well-known black-and-white artist; he *did* have sandwichmen to advertise it all up and down the streets; he *did* take the whole of the front page of the "Daily Mail"; he *did* have huge chunks in all the other papers. And the reviewers, who are invariably kind to new authors if they show any promise, were kind to Andrew. They did not praise him sufficiently to turn his head, but they set him on the broad high-road of authorship.

It was shortly after this event that Andrew, all unwittingly, made his first enemy. The cause and extent of that enmity does not concern us in this story, and the fact itself would have been allowed to pass without mention but that it constituted another significant stage in Andrew's history. It proved that he had traversed all the difficult miles between lunch-cake and snails in their shells.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERY OF SYLVIA—AND THE SOLUTION

WITHIN a few weeks of the day when Andrew's name first came prominently before the reading public, the gentle Mrs. Kesterton touched the electric bell that hung over her bed, and told the maid that she wished to speak with Miss Sylvia. Sylvia at once hurried to her mother, for she had been warned by the doctor that the end was not very far off, and might come quite suddenly. When she entered the room, Mrs. Kesterton was lying upon her pillows, the sweet faint smile that had become habitual through so many years still upon her face. She beckoned to Sylvia to sit down upon the bed at her side, and then took one of her daughter's hands in both her own.

"You mustn't be frightened, darling, but I think I am going now. I don't want you to cry if you can help it, because I should like my last glimpse of you to be soothing and cheerful. Everything is all in order. You need not feel compelled to marry unless you like, but I hope you'll marry Andrew. I always think of you together."

Sylvia, forcing back her tears with a great effort, because she knew that her mother would be troubled if she cried, asked whether she should send for the doctor.

"No, my darling, the poor man did everything he

could a long time ago. I don't want him here now. I want to have these last few minutes quite alone with you. . . . You know, Sylvia, you must never be frightened about dying. People distress themselves so much about it that most of them, I think, spoil their lives. It's such a pity, because this last sleep is the most beautiful gift that Nature has to bestow. I've thought a great deal about these matters lying here in this quiet old house so many months, and I see quite clearly that one is not really one's body; it is the soul that is really ourselves. If you think of the growth of a flower you will understand what I mean. First of all, the flower is just a little seed in the dark earth, and it has to push its way through this earth before it can grow up, and blossom, and give forth its beautiful scent and colour to the world. Well, I think of the soul as the flower, and of the body as the earth. . . .

"I'm always so sorry for the poor people who can't understand that, because it must be dreadful to believe that the soul dies with the body. It must make everything so sordid. . . . I'm glad I've been given the strength to say all this to you; these puzzling things become so very clear just as one is about to leave the body, and I wanted them to be clear to you."

Sylvia bent down and kissed the still faintly smiling lips. Then, as Mrs. Kesterton closed her eyes, the girl sat very still, her hands clasped in those frail ones from which the little flicker of remaining strength imperceptibly departed.

When Sylvia had been alone in the world long enough for the first grief to have subsided, Andrew

wrote to her and asked her if she could not arrange some date, however distant, for their marriage. Her reply, although as full of love and tenderness as ever, was distinctly evasive. There were things to settle, she said, before she could settle herself. Then she had promised to pay visits to various friends and relatives, so that Andrew must not be surprised if her letters were not very frequent, and came from all sorts of addresses.

This puzzled him. He could understand that there were things to settle, and he could understand that she would have to visit various relatives, but why should that prevent her from writing to him? And why, when she did write to him, was he told to address his reply to a Post Office? There was some mystery about the whole affair, and he did not at all like the look of it. Sylvia, in short, was "up to something." Andrew challenged her with being "up to something" in his letters, but she merely laughed at his suspicions, and would not enlighten him.

On a certain morning, there arrived at "The Studio" office a parcel bearing the name of a well-known photographer at Floodington. Andrew opened the parcel, and found that it contained some extremely good photographs of a local professional production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The Manager of this particular theatre was famous for his Shakespearean productions, which often ran ten or twelve weeks, or even more. Thinking that it would please the Floodingtonians to see their Manager's efforts recognised in the pages of "The Studio," Andrew turned over the photographs and examined them rather carefully.

One of the pictures struck him as being particularly charming. It showed a group of fairies surrounding Bottom the Weaver. The girls were unusually pretty, and one face in particular appealed to Andrew. He took up the magnifying-glass that always lay on his desk, and studied this face more attentively. And it was then he realised, with one of the most profound shocks that he had ever received in his life, that he was either looking at Sylvia or her exact double.

Was it possible? Was this the explanation of her curious behaviour? Had she, all those long months and even years in that quiet country village, been secretly cherishing a passion for the stage? Andrew snatched her latest letter from his pocket, and found, although it gave no address, that the envelope bore the Floodington postmark.

He decided instantly what he must do. Obtaining leave of absence from Mr. Baradale, he dashed round to his rooms, thrust some things into a bag, and caught the noon express to Floodington. Of course there was no matinee, and so he filled in his time by taking a look at Bayfield College, and even ventured to saunter past the home of the lambent-eyed Miss Jessie Green.

At last it was time to go to the theatre, and he had the felicity of being the first person to enter the stalls. He had secured an end seat, and a pair of opera-glasses. He felt nervous, elated, angry, loving, haughty, and intensely curious. At the worst, it was exciting to think that the mystery would be solved before he went to bed that night.

There was not the slightest doubt in his mind, from the moment the fairies entered, that he had discovered

his Sylvia. But was she his Sylvia? Had she fallen in love with some actor, and hurled herself into this profession in order to be near him? The Lysander was a good-looking ruffian, and the Demetrius was just the sort of oaf, so Andrew supposed, to appeal to the feminine mind. At one moment he was quite sure that it was Lysander for whose sake Sylvia had done this mad thing; at the next, when he thought he saw her looking at Demetrius, he made up his mind to tear that gentleman's comely head from his body as soon as the performance was over. He would dearly have loved to execute the ruffian on the stage, but that would have made a great scandal, besides frightening the audience and the company.

Directly the curtain fell, he hurried round to the stage-door, as though he expected that Sylvia would emerge from the theatre still dressed as a fairy. All sorts of people were passing in and out, and the swing-doors were never still for more than a few seconds together.

Presently the orchestra came out, followed very shortly afterwards by the supers. Then the company began to pass through the swing-doors, and Andrew had the satisfaction of seeing Lysander walk off with a stout lady, who addressed him as "dearie," and suggested tripe and onions with a nice glass of stout. Demetrius also came out, in a soft felt hat very much on one side, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and a little cane under his arm. He glanced at Andrew, but immediately looked away again, as though he did not wish to defile his beautiful eyes by allowing them to rest on ordinary and unworthy objects.

"He'd be all over me," thought Andrew, "if he knew I could publish his beastly portrait in 'The Studio.'"

Two or three little girls, with hair down their backs, and their eyes and cheeks still plastered with make-up, came next. They lingered in the doorway, laughing and talking with the stage-doorkeeper, and occasionally glancing up at Andrew from beneath their far too black eyelashes.

And then came Sylvia. She was alone, and had taken off all her make-up. She was very quietly dressed in a small hat and a long coat reaching to her heels. She would have passed Andrew without even glancing at him, but he put his hand out and just touched her sleeve. Sylvia started, and then turned so pale that Andrew was frightened.

"Sorry," he said.

"What a start you gave me! What on earth are you doing here?"

"May I walk along with you and explain?"

"Of course."

His little story was soon told. It was then Sylvia's turn.

"You know," she began, "that I always had it in my mind when you first went away to London that you were leaving me behind. I don't mean that in any sense of reproach; you had to go out into the world, you had to fight for your living, and you've done it, and you've won. Now you want me to marry you. But we can't marry yet, Andrew—not for a long time."

"Why not? You can go on with your acting if you like."

"Oh, no, thank you. I haven't been very long on

the stage, but already I've seen enough to show me the folly of that sort of arrangement. If two people who are married are both on the stage, and can be in the same company, that's all very well, but if one's on the stage, and the other isn't, that one should be the man and not the woman. You see, the man, in any case, must have his work and his career; but when a girl is married, that is her work and her career."

"And you mean that you prefer the work and the career of an actress to the work and the career of being my wife?"

"That's a very naughty way of putting it," replied Sylvia, smiling at him through the lamplight. "When I say that we can't be married for a long time, I mean that it will be a long time before I'm fit to be your wife."

"What frightful nonsense!"

"No, it isn't nonsense. I thought it all out. I thought of all the things you've done, and all the experiences you've had, and all the people you've met; you may think you're the same Andrew that went away to London to make his fortune, but you're not; you're a very different Andrew, and a different Andrew would require a different sort of person for his wife. He wouldn't be contented very long with a silly little girl from the country who knew nothing, and couldn't understand half the things he was talking about. He wants a girl who has come up against life just in the same way that he did; a girl who has been through her own battles and won them; a girl who can exchange ideas with him, and perhaps even tell him a few things that he doesn't know himself."

"Then d'you mean to say that you deliberately went

on the stage because you thought you weren't fitted to be my wife until you'd seen something of the world?"

"Yes, that was why I did it."

"Then you don't care a bit about it? Your heart isn't in it?"

Andrew spoke a shade too eagerly.

"Oh, I'm not going to be caught like that! I'm quite interested in what I'm doing, but I mean to do very much better. I mean to work very hard, and see if I can't make a success in my profession. When I do, then you may come to me—if you're not by that time a married man with a large family—and ask me to marry you."

"And if you don't make a success of it?"

"Well, then, doesn't it occur to you that I should have been through the mill even more thoroughly than if I *had* made a success?"

"But I don't want you to go through the mill! I hate the thought of you being mixed up in all this sort of thing! You weren't born to it; you know perfectly well your mother would have hated it! She'd be furious with me for letting you do it!"

"I don't think so," said Sylvia, with a pensive little smile. "I think Mother would have been rather astonished at my having so much sense."

"Didn't she want you to marry me?"

"Yes, she wanted us to be married."

"And you?"

"Well, I haven't married the curate at Eastwood."

"Does that mean that you do want to marry me?"

They had reached the door of her lodgings in a deserted, gloomy thoroughfare very familiar to tour-

ing players. Sylvia mounted the step, took a latch-key from her little satchel, and slipped it into the lock before replying.

"I haven't married the curate at Eastwood," she repeated.

"Damn the curate at Eastwood!" retorted Andrew. "Can't you have a little pity on a poor devil all alone in the world? You say I've made good; what's the use of it? What can I do with my money except fling it away? D'you expect me to mope at home in the evenings? I can't do it! I should shoot myself! It's just an eternal, sickening round of restaurants, and clubs, and theatres, and music-halls! Yes, I know you'll remind me that I wanted all those things—wanted them badly. Well, I've got them, and they're no good. I want you, and I want a home, and I want somebody to be glad when I do a decent bit of work, and somebody to share in my little twopenny triumphs! . . . Frightfully old-fashioned, isn't it? I don't care. I'm like that. I tell you, Sylvia, I'm speaking the truth from the bottom of my heart when I say that I can't do without you any longer. If you turn me down tonight, I'll start going to the devil tomorrow!"

"Wouldn't that be rather weak?"

"Yes, it would! I am weak! I know where I'm weak—that's why you've got to come and help me! . . . Oh, darling, for God's sake don't leave me in the lurch!"

They were close together on the step. The door was still shut. He tried to put his arm about her shoulders, but, very gently, she repulsed him.

"You mustn't do that."

"Why not?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Never mind."

"But I do mind! You shall tell me! I don't care what happens! You don't go through that door till you've given me a jolly sight better reason for not marrying me than I've had yet! That's flat!"

"Don't be silly, Andrew. You must go away. Good-night."

For answer, he snatched the key from the lock and put it in his pocket. She tried to ring the bell, but he caught her by the wrist.

"You're hurting me," she protested.

"I don't care!" And he seized the other wrist.

"This is the way to make me hate you!"

"Hate me, then!" And he drew her quite close to him.

"I'm not going to kiss you!"

"Yes, you are!"

"I'm not! You can't make me!"

"Can't I?" His lips were on hers, his arms wound tightly about her. She could not speak any more; she could hardly breathe. The street, and the lamps, and the black houses began to swim. She knew that she would have fallen had he released her.

All the forces of Nature gathered about them, working for him, working, too, for her.

Quite involuntarily, scarcely conscious of what she was doing, she kissed him. . . .

THE END

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